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WARD & DOWNEY'S CHEAP NOVELS.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS.

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12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

WARD & DOWNEY'S TWO-SHILLING NOVELS.

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- HANDSOME JACK.** By JAMES GREENWOOD.
- TEMPEST DRIVEN.** By RICHARD DOWLING.
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12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON, W.C.

WHAT HAST THOU DONE?

BY

J. FITZGERALD MOLLOY.

Author of

"A MODERN MAGICIAN," "THAT VILLAIN ROMEO," &c.

What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite
And laid the love juice on some true love's sight.
Midsummer Night's Dream.

NEW EDITION.

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WHAT HAST THOU DONE?

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CHAPTER I.

RICHARD PURCELL ARRIVES.

It was just six o'clock on a May evening, and the inhabitants of Grantsborough, a small town situated in the south of Ireland, were expecting the mail car which carried travellers to and from the nearest railway station, a distance of eight miles. The arrival of this link of communication with the capital was an event exceeding in interest the delivery of letters, for few of the population had epistolary or other correspondence with the world abroad, whilst all were interested in seeing such passengers as were driven into the town, concerning whom they found food for hungry curiosity and employment for idle speculation.

This mental occupation afforded matter for friendly interchange of thought between neighbour and neighbour across the streets or from adjacent door-posts, and helped to break the monotony of normal dulness.

The town was small, rather compact than straggling. In the centre stood a square, where cattle were bought and sold on market-days, fenced in by short grey stone pillars, from which iron chains had once depended; but the pillars were in

various stages of dilapidation, and seemed like drunken sentries, whilst the chains were in many places broken and gone. Where they withstood the wear of time, and yet hung, children used them as swings. Inside the square, as if marking its boundary, oak, linden, and beech trees flourished, in whose branches generations of rooks had built themselves homes, lived, mated, fought, and brought up their young in the way they should fly.

During summer the giant branches of these trees spread above the roofs of surrounding houses, sheltering the square, the animals taking refuge in shade, and the children playing round the pillars; whilst on winter nights the bare boughs swung to and fro as winds whistled through them drearily, disturbing the rooks, that now and then uttered hoarse croaks sounding in the darkness like cries of defiance or fear.

In the centre of the square stood an old monument, triangular shaped and built of common stone and mortar, on one side of whose base was an almost obliterated inscription in Irish, setting forth the valour and virtues of one Hugh Fitzmaurice, who fell with his face to the invader; on the top of this, modern desecration placed a gas lamp.

All round, at a considerable distance, the principal buildings and streets of Grantsborough were situated; the Roman Catholic chapel, a large, long edifice built of limestone, stood beside the Protestant church, formerly an Augustinian monastery, about whose walls ivy clustered thickly. The church was surrounded by a graveyard, where those gone before of both denominations lay resting side by side, as if, grown wise in death, they had forgotten all foolish wrangling of creeds, and mingled their common dust and ashes in eternal peace.

Opposite the church stood the National Bank, an imposing building of grey cut stone, with plate-glass windows, looking painfully new and sadly out of place beside the dark old Tholsel, raised, said tradition, in the thirteenth century. Within its walls the Grantsborough corporation, good burgomasters all, if somewhat dull of intellect, and slow of speech, with grave deliberation framed local laws and delivered mandates; there also strolling players strutted for a brief inglorious hour; sixth-rate concert-singers gave weak imitations of "stars," leaving murderous memories of operatic selections behind them; and public meetings were held, where political opponents waxed wrathful.

The hotel was close by, a large, many-windowed house with a flight of steps leading to the door, outside which piles of commercial travellers' cases and belongings were usually grouped. Branching from the square at the south side was the principal street where the police-barrack and post-office stood, a thoroughfare whose sober dulness was never disturbed save on weekly market days; at the north side was the broad road leading to the county town and the nearest railway station, whilst to the east rose a hill leading to the mountains.

This hill was known as the fashionable quarter of the town; though situated eastwards it was regarded as a west-end locality, by an agreeable stretch of imagination having gentility for its lawful aim and end. Here the parish priest and two of his curates resided; the doctor whose household decorations aimed at æstheticism; a couple of solicitors, and the sub-inspector of police, called by courtesy "Captain," the lord of the manor's agent, and other persons of like degree who put forth claims to be included amongst a favoured class.

The only shop having the privilege of being situated on the hill was an apothecary's, kept by Mr. Lawlor, to whose name his neighbours prefixed the degree of doctor. His establishment was not regarded as an infringement on the high respectability of the site, for Mr. Lawlor was actually the son of a surgeon, and Mrs. Lawlor and her five daughters were genteel, and it might be added fashionable, and moreover had been known to have drunk tea with Mrs. Pender Pender, whose salon was regarded as the gate to the aristocratic circle of Grantsborough society.

The hill commanded a sweeping view of the square and part of the principal street, so that it was quite possible for Mrs. Pender Pender to see from her drawing-room who went shopping, who made calls, how her neighbours clad and conducted themselves generally; and quite as easy for a detachment of the Misses Lawlor to observe, from between the gigantic glass bottles filled with green, blue, and crimson liquids, standing in their father's shop window, at what hour the bank-clerks left their office, in which direction they proceeded for a walk, or how long Dr. Fowler stayed in the hotel presumably playing billiards and drinking weak whisky and water.

At the top of the hill, where the houses on either side ended, a broad road wound round Sir Lawrence Usher's park. From this a fine view of the quaint town and the undulating country stretching around was obtainable. Immediately below stood the wide ten-arched bridge, ornamented on one side by Ionic pillars, between which grass, lichen and wild flowers grew in luxuriance. Between the grey arches, the limpid river flowed smoothly for about a hundred yards, and was then suddenly stemmed by an old brown weir stretching from bank to bank; when it

again gained liberty, the tide swept placidly onward until parted by small islands covered with rushes, after passing which it became united once more and sailed murmurously happy between meadow-lands and cornfields on one side, and woods creeping down to mirror themselves in its surface on the other.

The town clock had just struck six, and the great bell, hung in a wooden belfry standing in the chapel yard, rang the first strokes of the Angelus, so suddenly as to startle the rooks, who immediately raised their voices in loud protest. The mail car was now due.

Mrs. Pender Pender was seated at her drawing-room window, her favourite post of observation, whilst a detachment of the Misses Lawlor stood at the iron gate of the little garden leading to their father's shop. Two or three of the bank clerks leant against and stood around the hotel door, smoking and conversing with a friendly commercial traveller. The mail-car always started from, and arrived at, the inn, and had its regular group of attendants and idlers to greet its coming and speed its parting; nor were they absent on the present occasion.

"Late again, sure enough," said one of these, known under the soubriquet of Ted the Gom, a ragged, dirty-looking fellow, with a half-silly, half-hungry look on his bearded face, and a hat on the back of his head, which time and ill-usage had long since deprived of all shape and colour.

"Never you mind," said one of the ostlers.

"An' I'll bet it's the black mare is a-tween the shafts to-night; an' it's she's always late."

"Maybe it's expecting a job you are, an' in a bit ov a hurry t' earn the price ov it," said another hanger-on, a rival of Ted's, who had no regular occupation, but was ever ready to carry luggage,

run with messages, or execute such odd jobs as "the neighbours put in his way."

"Sure, an' I wouldn't abject to that same."

"Any more nor you'd abject to a dhrop o' whisky?"

"Begor, if the sergeant there," said Ted, wilfully mistaking the rank of an exceedingly raw-looking member of the police force, who had come from the barracks, to receive Her Majesty's mails, "was t' ask me t' have a dhrop, I'd think mighty hard entirely o' refusin' him; though 'twould go straight against me conscience, afther what Father Mahony himself said a Sunday at last mass about th' accasions a sin!"

Those standing around laughed, and the representative of law and order moved a step or two further away.

"Ah thin, it's yoursel' is the boy for the whisky, anyhow," said a middle-aged woman, who was waiting an opportunity of plying her profession as a beggar. Her head was covered with a hood seemingly made out of a collection of various coloured rags, and her shoulders with an old woollen table-cover, mended here and there with patches boldly defying harmony in shape or hue.

"Hould yer tongue, Biddy the Blarney," said Ted, with mock indignation, "don't make the sergeant ashamed ov offerin' me the glass, long life t' him, an' it's himsel' is the fine young man, and maybe it's a glass he'll give yoursel'."

"Thanks be to God, I wouldn't take it from no wan," she answered. "Sure, it's a dhrop o' whiskey that never enthers me lips."

"Throth, an', if not, you dhrank yer tay over sthrong t' other night at ould Jimmy Roche's wake," said Ted, winking knowingly at his rival.

"Oh, God forgive the liards that said such a

thing o' me," she replied, raising her hands in an attitude savouring of melodrama.

"An' they say you prayed mighty hard for ould Jimmy's sowl afther the third cup," said one of the stable men, with a broad grin on his face.

"Ay, an' she sint him to Heaven afore Father Mahony could say, 'God be merciful to him.'"

"An' why wouldn't she?" asked Tim. "Sure, she stands in a good man's shoes anyhow."

This was a delicate reference to an old pair of boots she wore, about three sizes too big for her feet, which the parish priest had given her, an act, though trivial in itself, of which the whole town was aware.

"Oh, God forgive you all," she replied, drawing her parti-coloured hood around her head, "for humbugging a poor lone woman like mesel'."

"Amen!" said Ted, with mock solemnity.

"Here we are at last," said that gentleman's rival, as a horn announcing the mail-car sounded.

All eyes turned towards the street-corner by which the car entered the square.

"An' there's some wan on't with a big American trunk, more power to him," said Ted.

Almost as he spoke the car arrived at the hotel door and the solitary passenger, a tall, broad-shouldered man, muscular and straight of limb, jumped down and looked round him. His complexion was dark, his forehead broad, his eyes brown and expressive; the lower part of his face was covered by a thick moustache and beard.

"Are you fur the hotel, sir?" asked a waiter belonging to that establishment, touching his forehead with his forefinger.

Before the stranger could answer, a maid-servant in a smart cap and white apron, who had come tripping down the hill as the mail-car drove in,

went up to him, and, addressing him by his name as if not quite sure of his identity, said :

"If you please, sir, I'll take your rugs ; the ladies are waiting for you."

A pleasant light came into his eyes and spread over his face.

"All right," he said, "I'll follow you, and my luggage can follow me."

"I'll take charge of it for yer honour," said Ted the Gom. The labels bore the name of Richard Purcell.

"An' may the Holy Mother watch over you an' purtect you, an' lave the poor woman a copper," said Biddy the Blarney, plaintively.

"I did not think any representatives of your order were left in Ireland," he said, good-humouredly, looking at her patched hood and the faded woollen table-cover which she drew closely around her.

"I'm not belonging to an ordher, sir ; sure I'm not good enough for that, glory be to God, an' it's them that's in ordhers are rale saints ; but give me a penny, an' I'll pray that the blessed Mother may give you a bed in heaven."

He laughed, and handed her sixpence with the same air as if he were restoring to a gentlewoman some article she had dropped, and then went on, leaving her to follow him with a string of invocations and compliments, of which he caught the refrain, "An' may heaven smile on yer purty face," to which Ted the Gom somewhat irreverently replied, "Whist, Biddy the Blarney !"

CHAPTER II.

THEIR DEAR NEPHEW.

THE tall, dark-complexioned man went up the hill, past the apothecary's shop, running a blockade of sharp criticism from its occupants, until the servant, stopping at a small, semi-detached house standing in a little garden, held the gate open and waited for him to precede her. Giving one rapid glance at the domicile, he advanced to the hall-door, which was opened by a tall, stately, middle-aged gentlewoman, who flung her arms round his neck and kissed his cheek.

When she had gone through this ceremony, a second lady, looking a little older and quainter, advanced; she was much lower in stature, and the tall man bending down took her in his arms and kissed her heartily, as he did so a dimness came into his eyes, and a strange sensation gathered in his throat.

"My dear nephew, my dear Richard," said the little woman, in a tremulous voice.

He did not reply, and they both led him into the drawing-room, a stately apartment, with white lace curtains and anti-macassars, solid handsome chairs, uncovered for the occasion, and ranged at equal distances from each other, and at an even space from the white satin-papered walls, a centre table, on which rested books and little ornaments, guiltless of disarrangement; bunches of wax flowers under glass shades stood at either side of the high, narrow-ledged, white marble chimney-piece.

"Are you Aunt Maria?" he said to the taller of the ladies, "or Aunt Allie?"

"I am Allie," she replied smiling at him kindly, and letting her eyes rest on his face, as if she wished to let its every line and expression sink into her mind.

"You know our names quite well," said the other lady. She also turned her dark eyes on him, eyes wonderfully bright and soft, notwithstanding that time had begun to trace wrinkles around them.

"Ay," he answered in a cheery voice that seemed to fill the room and his hearers' ears with unwonted music. "I know not only your names, but all about your lives; my poor mother used often to talk to me of the time when you three were girls; and though she was separated from you by an ocean, I think her heart was always in the old home."

"Poor child," Aunt Maria said, unconsciously drawing nearer to him, and placing her small, delicate hand on the back of his great fist as it lay upon one knee. He took her fingers in his, and pressed them in his palm, and from that time it seemed he had in some way regained much that had vanished from his life at his mother's death.

"We will have dinner presently," said Aunt Allie.

"We are old-fashioned people," added Aunt Maria, "and usually dine——"

"At three," he said.

"Yes, at three; but we have waited for you to-day."

"You are very good; but you must not do so any other day. I wouldn't change any of the old ways for worlds."

Aunt Maria was pleased at this speech, and both ladies laughed.

"One of our old ways is to conduct guests to their rooms; let me do so now," said Aunt Allie.

Presently, when he came downstairs he entered the dining-room, a far more sociable and less prim apartment than the drawing-room. The cumbrous, comfortable chairs round the table looked like old servants that had outlived their time under the kindly care of their mistresses; the curiously-carved sideboard, almost black with age, was an heirloom; the walls painted green were relieved here and there by dim oil-paintings in massive gilt frames; and the large window opening to the sloping garden behind the house, framed a bright picture of old-fashioned flower-beds, a grassy sward, and the branches of a tree growing far down, whose leaves quivered against a background of dark blue sky.

The dinner-bell had rung two or three minutes before, so that when he entered both ladies were sitting at the table, though the covers were not removed, Aunt Maria, by right of seniority, at the head, Aunt Allie at the foot.

The latter, who looked much younger than her sister, was attired in a black velvet dress, with a deep lace collar round the throat, fastened by a large brooch, in which a miniature of her grandfather in a bag-wig and red coat was handsomely set. Both sisters had dark eyes, which time had seemed to soften whilst robbing of their light, and in both faces was an expression of calm but cheerful resignation, as if they were conscious of having missed some clue to happiness now for ever beyond their reach.

But here all resemblance ended. Aunt Maria's features were irregular, and almost plain, whilst her sister's were well cut, and must have been beautiful in the bloom and grace of youth. When dinner was over, dessert placed on the table, and the well-trained servant had retired, Richard Purcell said :

"I thought I should have known the exterior of

the house, but I was wrong; it was not the same that I had often pictured to myself, but I knew the bearings of the interior well enough. I felt assured I should meet the old brass-figured, inlaid clock in the lobby, as well as I knew I should see the portrait of my great-grandfather hanging over the chimney-piece, the same old gentleman who figures on Aunt Allie's brooch."

"And were you disappointed in us?" Aunt Maria asked.

"No, I should have known you both anywhere, I fancy."

Both ladies exchanged glances that were eloquent of mutual delight.

"It would have been a capital joke, if I had disguised myself as a fortune-teller, and told you all about your past lives. Why, I might have established my reputation all over the county, and have left bending under the weight of sixpenny pieces. By the way, who were the girls outside the apothecary's door?"

"The Miss Lawlors," said Aunt Allie, laughingly.

"It would have been great fun to have told them their fortunes," he said, feeling amused at the idea, "but I suppose it's rather too late now to attempt disguise, after the keen scrutiny with which they honoured me. I felt as if I were a target for their eyes."

"They are sharp girls, and rather clever, so far as conversation goes," said Aunt Maria.

"They are friends of yours?"

"We have known them since they were children."

"Well, when I meet them, I will pretend to be learned in palmistry, and map out as glowing a future for each of them as could be desired for any heroine of a penny journal."

Both ladies almost unconsciously looked at each other, and then at him, with an expression he could not quite fathom.

"Strange," said Aunt Maria, thoughtfully.

"What?" he asked, feeling some curiosity.

"You call a subject to mind in connection with your dear mother's life, which made an impression on me I have never quite forgotten."

"If it is painful, I am sorry," he said, his face growing suddenly grave.

"It is not, Richard," she replied gently.

"Then it is about palmistry?"

"It is. One day, when your mother was still very young, she encountered an old woman sitting by the side of a ditch, with a child strapped to her back. She appeared in a miserable condition——"

"She was a gipsy," interrupted Aunt Allie, who never liked to be left out in the coldness of silence.

"And said she was hungry," continued the other lady, taking up the narrative as if it were a stage dialogue. "So she asked for help, and your dear mother, who was the most tender-hearted of mortals, gave her the only coin she had about her."

"A shilling," said Aunt Allie, brushing away an imaginary crumb from her black velvet gown.

"I remember the occurrence as if it happened yesterday," continued Aunt Maria; "we thought it extravagant of her."

"We did," said Aunt Allie, "but no doubt the gipsy thought it generous, and in gratitude offered to tell your mother's fortune."

"She consented——"

"Half in jest, dear."

"And the woman looked at her hand, and told her, poor child, she would soon marry a tall dark-haired man, with whom she would leave home and cross the sea."

"At this time she had not seen your father," said Aunt Allie, in parenthesis, "and never dreamt of leaving us."

"But soon after your father's brother came and took a farm near the town, and—and—you know the rest," said the old lady sinking her voice and ending her sentence with a sigh.

"I do," Purcell replied. "My father and mother fell in love though he was not in a social position equal to hers," he added, with just a touch of satire sounding in his voice, and marring its music like a discordant note; "but Nature overlooks such obstacles."

"Besides," said Aunt Maria, very softly, "he was of a different religion, and—and we thought it our duty to oppose what we considered a mere fancy; but she——"

"Was too true a woman to let opposition stand in the way of another's happiness as well as her own, and she married him, and went to America, where I came into existence, where my father went into business and made money, and where they both died when I had come to the years of manhood."

After this there was a silence of some minutes between the three, which was at length broken by Aunt Maria.

"Richard," she said, with a little quiver in her voice that told his sensitive ear how much she felt, "there is one question I must ask you."

"Well aunt?" he said anxious to help her.

"Did she ever feel—did she ever say we had been unkind to her?"

"She never said so, and I am sure she never thought or felt you had been."

A sigh that told of relief escaped Aunt Maria's breast.

"We did what we thought our duty in opposing her marriage, but we dealt justly by her God knows; and, when the step was once taken which could never be retraced, we showed her no anger. It was your father's wish they should emigrate to America; we wrote to her constantly till the day of her death."

"Believe me she never blamed you," he said, with kindness and gentleness in his voice—"never thought of you both but with affection, and every letter you wrote her she kept as her most valuable possession. I have them all with me now."

Tears gathered in Aunt Maria's eyes.

"Poor child!" she said; for all the years that had gone by passed as a cloud, and mentally she beheld her sister youthful and bright as when she had left to seek a home across the seas. It was with a start that looking up she saw that sister's son, whose name was familiar to her for almost thirty years, but whom she had never seen until this evening. Glancing at him she beheld the expression of that other face which had just risen to the surface of her mind.

They had quite finished dessert, but still lingered at the table, as if unwilling to break the happy spell of their first meeting; and as they sat the last ray of sunlight faded from the sky, the smell of mignonette and violets grew heavy as the dew descended on the flower beds outside, and twilight gradually deepening, showed each the other's face looking pale and almost weird.

At last Purcell said:

"I have forgotten something, or rather some one, old Nancy, my mother's nurse. Is she living with you yet?"

Both sisters laughed, evidently pleased by his recollection.

"Old Nancy is with us still; poor old soul, how glad she will be to know you have asked for her."

"I think if I went to bed without seeing her, and remembered her in the middle of the night, I should not rest till morning."

"And I'm sure," said Aunt Allie, "she is all impatience to see you. I wonder she has not found some excuse to come up; she has been talking of you for months, since you first promised to come, and has been counting the days until your arrival."

"We must first have lights, Allie."

"Very well, dear."

Presently, when the cluster of wax candles at each side of the high marble chimney-piece had been lighted, Nancy was sent for, and came from the kitchen slowly, resting both feet on each step and muttering confidentially to herself.

Her brown wrinkled face was set in a deep white-bordered cap; she wore a coloured woollen handkerchief crossed over her breast, and a large apron of blue and white check descended from her waist to the end of her short gown. She was over seventy years, and had spent almost half a century in the service of her present mistresses. When she came into the room, her bright grey eyes travelled round the apartment until they lighted on Purcell; then without speaking a word she advanced towards him with a cautious air, her left hand on her hip, her right hand extended over her eyes, as if for the purpose of shading or concentrating her sight.

"An' are you Miss Fanny's son anyhow?" the old woman said, when by slow degrees she had reached him and had carefully scrutinized his features.

"I am—Nancy," he replied. On mentioning her name, her features gave a sudden twitch.

He held out his hand which she shook heartily, and kissed again and again.

"Musha, thanks be to God and the Holy Mother that left me the light o' me ould eyes to see you," she said, her voice half choked with sobs.

Purcell could not venture to reply.

"Poor Miss Fanny the craythur, God be good to her, an' sure it's a prayer will do her no harm anyhow, as I often says to mesel' an' I could never help praying for her, though the mistress an' Miss Allie thinks 'twill do her no good wanst she's gone, but I can't help it; I think it brings us together agin somehow, nearer even than when she was alive an' livin' beyond the say, an' if I didn't pray for her 'twould seem t' mesel' as if I forgot her, an' sure I could never do that as long as I'm alive."

"Thank you, Nancy," he said, feeling much touched; a prayer can do her no harm, as you say, and may do her good."

"Are you a Prodesdant?" she said quickly, peering keenly into his face as she spoke.

"My religion is not bound by any creed," he answered.

"Sure I don't know what that manes; but if you're a Prodesdant itself, they're not the worst sort. I have earned good bread from them all me life, an' I always sticks up for them; not," she added, looking round her archly—"not that I say it before 'em."

"I'm sure not," responded Purcell, watching her old brown wrinkled face whose expression changed with every sentence she spoke.

"Ah Miss Allie dear," she went on lowering her voice to a softer key, "hasn't he the eyes of his poor mother out an' out?"

"He has, Nancy, you are quite right."

"Sure it's I ought to know better nor anyone else

in the world. I came to nurse her when she was a little thing not higher than me knee, an' she used t' call me 'Ancy, the darlin', an' I nursed her through the mazels mesel',—for the poor mother was just dead,—and through the scarletina afterwards; an' I tuck her in me arms when I thought she was dyin', an' not a bit o' me afeered to take it mesel', for I thought if she died I might as well go, I was that fond of her," she said, wiping her eyes at the recollection.

"So you were, Nancy," said Aunt Maria, kindly.

"An' it's she that grew up the fine girl," continued the old nurse, "an' a lovely young woman as you need wish t' see, an' I thought me heart would break in me body when she got married an' went away to 'Merica. Sure it's the quare world we live in anyhow, as I often says to mesel'—a dirty world entirely, but thanks be to God that left me alive, Miss Maria dear, to see me poor child's son, an' he a fine man, an' it's the music of his voice that warms the heart in me ould body this blessed night."

Purcell was at a loss to thank her for the wealth of honest love poured out over one whose memory was most sacred to him. He was more affected by all that had passed since he entered the house than he could have believed possible; a dull swelling rose in his heart.

Old Nancy did not need any words to know how he felt, her keen grey eyes looked into his face and read his thoughts.

"Now, Nancy, you know Mister Richard is tired after travelling to-day, and we must not talk too much," said Aunt Allie touching lightly on the old woman's pet weakness.

"Sure you always says I talks too much, Miss Allie dear, an' I wouldn't for the world make

Misther Richard tired; is it me to throuble him, after he askin' for me with his own lips the minute he was done his dinner, oh, no ! ”

“ You and I will have many a long chat Nancy,” Purcell said to her as she turned to depart. Then he gave her his hand once more, and pleasant light came into her face as she walked slowly out of the room ; they could hear her muttering to herself as she descended the kitchen stairs.

When he was at last alone in his bedroom, Purcell thrust his feet into a pair of old slippers, and lighted his pipe. How fresh and sweet everything in the place seemed ; the linen was scented with lavender, the curtains were spotless as snowflakes, fresh flowers were in the old-fashioned china vases on the chimney-piece.

Presently he lowered a window, and leaned out. All was silent save for the rippling stream on its way to the river, the occasional bleat of sheep in distant fields, and now and then the light sweep of rushes blown by night breezes, on the bank below.

There was no moon, but the stars were out in the clear sky. He could indistinctly see the bridge, and the great blurring shadow it flung on the waters rushing through its arches ; the meadows, and a long strip of road running between them, in the distance the dark outlines of Brandon Mountain, blending with the horizon, and far away to his right the wood stretching down to the Nore. And from distant meadows, and red pine-trees in the wood, and flowers in the garden below, came a mingled balm that made the night air heavy with perfume.

This must be Arcadia, he thought, leaning further out of the window to enjoy the full beauty of the scene. How wonderfully peaceful the place is, and how contented and happy the people should be

here, sheltered from the fret and fever, the sin and misery of cities.

He wondered if their lives were ever ruffled by a breath of passion or stained by a touch of crime. He thought not ; they could scarce lie down to sleep surrounded by this calm if soiled by evil, without feeling themselves as much out of place as a sin-covered soul would in heaven ; here the voice of conscience could be heard so distinctly that its cry would become unendurable ; it is only in the eternal bustle of cities we completely forget we have souls."

He watched the smoke of his pipe melt into air, and something like a sigh escaped his lips.

Out in the world beyond, of which the good people of this town knew nothing, he thought, men and women are living through these hours with nerves strained to fever pitch of excitement, theatres are filled by crowds, ball-rooms packed by social actors with ends to gain, gambling saloons thronged by those with the greed of hell in their eyes. And in great towns degrading vices hold sway, to think of which in such moments as these the heart sickens. And yet, for all the people here know of such scenes, they might as well occur nightly in another planet.

This was Arcadia ; beyond there are many Babylons, where in the wild storm of passions, souls are tossed blackened and lost, hearts are wrecked and crushed, lives blighted in a day. And yet the road leading from Arcadia to Babylon is crowded with those who afar off have felt the attraction of the moth for the flame.

He emptied his pipe of its ashes, then the town clock struck eleven, tolling the hours with a pause between each beat. After this, came silence once more.

CHAPTER III.

MAURICE FITZMAURICE.

WHEN breakfast was over next morning, Purcell said :

"I must take a walk down by the banks. I could catch the sound of a stream close by, greeting me when I woke up now and then through the night, and in the early morning, and I fell asleep again thinking what a happy fellow I was to have such a home as this in which to rest the sole of my foot, to have such relatives as you to receive me."

Both gentlewomen looked at him gratefully. They would like to have kissed him there and then for this speech, but were as yet somewhat shy of this bearded nephew whom they had known but a little while.

"Shall you be able to find your way to the banks?" asked Aunt Allie, with a gracious smile.

"I think I shall. I seem to know the place by intuition."

"When you go down the hill to the square, turn to your right, and you get into the Avenue Walk, then in the first meadow on your left you will see a path leading to the river, by which you come to the banks."

"I cannot go astray," he said. "Good-bye till dinner time. I shall not light my pipe till I am out of doors."

"Richard," said Aunt Maria, I have fitted up a

little study for you next your bedroom, where you can write, or read, or smoke whenever you please."

"Thanks, my good aunt, I am sorely afraid you will spoil me," he answered, waving them a good-bye with his hand as he left the room.

"Is he not a fine fellow?" said Aunt Allie, going to the window to watch him sauntering down the hill.

Some thoughts came into her mind that made her smile and sigh at once; then she turned to her sister and said:

"Maria dear, there are three of the Miss Lawlors watching him."

"You may feel certain they will never rest until they are introduced to him," replied Aunt Maria from the breakfast-table.

"I should not feel surprised if they followed him and introduced themselves," said Aunt Allie. "I wonder," she added, half to herself, "if he has lost his heart yet."

The day was bright, the sky clear, and that sense of exhilaration swayed the atmosphere which makes one glad of life. Purcell felt, as he walked by the meadows and sweet-smelling hayfields, breathing the pure air of the spring morning, and watching the river sparkling in the sunlight, as if he were at close quarters with happiness.

He lit his pipe and smoked as he went, lifting his head now and then towards the sky that sunshine might fall full and warm on his face. When he had walked for about half-an-hour, pausing occasionally under the deep shade of trees, he came to a sudden turn of the path and saw a young man fishing at a little distance down the bank.

His rod was stuck in the grass, and he was leaning against a tree with his back turned towards

Purcell, who stood a moment to watch him with a critical air, as if he were looking at the outline of a figure just sketched upon canvas.

"Whom have we here?" he said to himself; "let us see."

It was a habit of his, if opportunity permitted, to address people he met whether in railway carriages, omnibuses, on board steamers, or on country roads. In every man and woman he believed there was something worth observing; their conversation often gave clues to subjects uppermost in their minds, or to histories of their lives, and to him no book ever printed, no drama ever played was more interesting than the study of character, no matter how common-place.

He went forward, treading heavily on the turf, but the young man never moved, until Purcell said "Good morning." Then turning round, he lifted his cap, and bowed. Purcell in return took off his hat, and gave him a rapid, searching glance.

In appearance, he was scarce more than twenty. The suppleness of one used to exercise gave his tall, straight figure natural grace. A broad forehead, blue grey eyes, shaded by dark level brows, a straight nose and firm chin, presented a handsome face, somewhat keen and cold in repose, but capable of mobility and expressiveness in conversation.

"You are fishing?" said Purcell, looking at the rod.

"Yes for trout; usually there are plenty here, but to-day I have not killed one." He made answer with perfect composure.

"You are fond of fishing?"

"I am. It barely saves one from joining in the national occupation—idleness."

"That is not bad," said Purcell mentally, "I wonder who he is, native or tourist." Then he

added, aloud, "Have a cigar?" He knew a burnt offering at the shrine of acquaintanceship is often acceptable.

"Thank you, I have some matches."

"It is well to be idle sometimes."

"Probably you think so because you have first earned a right to its indulgence by labour."

"You are right," answered Purcell, wondering if the sharp-witted youth was native to the place. By way of satisfying his curiosity, he asked, "Have you been long in Grantsborough?"

"I'm sorry to say I live here, have been born and bred in the place."

"Why sorry? It seems a charming town."

"To strangers' eyes I have no doubt it is; to me familiarity has fulfilled her fatal task."

"Then——" began Purcell, but he checked himself.

"Why not leave, you were about to say!"

"Pardon me!"

"It is quite a natural question, and merely shows you are unfamiliar with Grantsborough," he replied, with a smile that was joyless.

"I shall soon know it very well; I have come to stay here for awhile."

"It seems odd to me any man should rest here willingly whilst all the world lies beyond."

"I have seen many countries; this has at least the attraction of novelty for me. You know who I am I suppose," continued Purcell, lying down on the grass for a comfortable stretch when he had lighted his cigar.

"Yes; at least I believe you are Mr. Purcell, the Miss Daileys' nephew."

"You are right again, and may I ask how you knew me?" feeling a little curious.

"In a place like this everyone knows all about

his neighbours, even to the merest details of their lives, as if they all lived in glass-houses," replied the young man, feeling as much at his ease with Purcell as if he had known him all his life. "There was scarcely a soul in Grantsborough last night that was unaware you had arrived; presently the bulk of the population will be able to tell you how many suits of clothes you have brought with you, or how many cigars you smoke on an average during the day."

He ended with a laugh that had more of contempt than enjoyment in its ring.

"This is wonderful and can scarcely always be comfortable," replied Purcell, feeling amused at the characteristics of provincial life, now disclosed for the first time.

"But it is true," said the young man, puffing at his cigar. "I was crossing the bridge last night when I encountered a detachment of your fair neighbours, four in number. We are old friends; catching sight of me they made a rush, and I knew they had something new to relate; didn't they tell it too, all four of them in one breath at first, and, when I couldn't quite follow the *quartette*, they told me in solos, of your arrival, each giving some descriptive item concerning your appearance, and adding a chorus of general surmises that you were rich, because you had given sixpence to a beggar, and a shilling to the fellow who carried your box."

"By Jupiter, this is refreshing," said Purcell. "I suppose I should feel flattered by the attentions of these young ladies."

"I don't think you should. Do you know, I always consider the town is like the whispering gallery of St. Paul's, whatever you say at one end in strict confidence is repeated aloud at the

other end before you're aware it has had time to travel."

"This doesn't quite agree with my ideas of Arcadia," Purcell thought, looking up at the sky through the thick branches of a lime tree beneath which he lay. "You live here?" he asked.

"Yes, I live with my father in a small cottage at the opposite side," he said pointing across the river. "I am an only son, my name is Maurice Fitzmaurice." Having imparted this information he paused as if considering, then continued:

"My father lives on the mere wreck of his fortunes—he squandered three and retrenched just in time to save this present small annuity on which we live. Two of his fortunes were spent in London, then he married my mother for her money—she was his second wife—and they lived here principally. She died ten years after her marriage, but not before my father had spent her portion. Our house was Mount Maurice—you can't catch sight of it from here, but lower down the bank you can—we had to leave it a year or so after my mother died; for we have been going down the hill steadily, you see," he added, with a ring of sarcasm in his voice, as if laughing at the misfortunes of his house.

"All the land at the other side of the river for miles and miles belonged to the Fitzmaurices once, and had been theirs since the days of Henry II. The property at this side belongs to the Ushers, to whom it was given by Cromwell. The Ushers hold theirs to the present day, but the Fitzmaurice lands have passed away from the original possessors, probably for ever." There was more of anger, as if from feelings of personal wrongs, than sorrow in his tone.

"Perhaps not for ever," said Purcell, cheerily. "Fortune's wheel has given many a strange turn before now."

"Nothing remains to me but the name. The poor people still treat my father with some of the respect once shown him by their betters, that is probably why we remain here; it seems to give him some paltry satisfaction."

"Does it not give you any?" asked Purcell; but the minute he had spoken he was sorry. The suspicion of a sneer resting on Fitzmaurice's lips deepened, and he gave a short laugh that had much bitterness in its sound.

"I take it for what it is worth," he answered.

"Pardon me, if I have said anything unpleasant."

Fitzmaurice bowed without looking at him.

"Thank you," Purcell said presently, "for your confidence."

He was anxious to appear interested in what had been said.

"It is no confidence. I am only the first to tell you what fifty others would be sure to state a little later."

Purcell thought this speech ungracious, but became more interested in his new acquaintance.

In a minute or two Fitzmaurice turned his face towards him with something of humour mingled with satire in its expression.

"Did you notice," he asked, "that large shop, all cut stone and plate-glass, you passed, at the corner of the square, when you were entering the town last evening?"

"With the name 'Hennessy' in large gold letters above the door?"

"Yes—well, the owner of that shop has bought Mount Maurice, and some of the land surrounding it, and expects soon to be made a Justice of the Peace. The old house was a deserted-looking place when we left it, for it had been long falling to ruin; it contained three habitable rooms, half the slates

were off the roof, and rain came through the ceilings; the banisters and some of the wainscoting had been used for fuel when days were cold and fires a necessity, and none of the rooms had had a coat of paint for half a century—but now all that is changed,” he said, with a laugh in which there was some sound of bitterness.

“How is that?”

“Hennessy being a man of taste, had the house repaired, had painters and decorators down from Dublin, filled the rooms with gorgeous furniture, went to Paris on a Cook’s excursion trip, and bought a couple of oil-paintings some one assured him were old masters, and made him pay for his information through the nose, I assure you.”

“Did he make his money here?”

“His father did, in a little shop the forerunner of the cut stone and plate-glass establishment, chiefly by lending money to the poorer class of farmers, willing to pay exorbitant interest in cases of pressing necessity, in order to get a few pounds now and then, and save themselves from being turned out of their homes.”

“I had no idea you knew anything of usury in this place.”

Fitzmaurice laughed heartily this time.

“You mustn’t use such plain language,” he said; “but I once did hear Hennessy called a usurer by a poor widow on whose household goods and solitary cow he had seized for the balance of interest that had in a few months exceeded the capital. I saw her kneeling down in the gutter outside his shop-door, and heard her curse him, but the prayers of the impoverished avail nothing, and Hennessy, to pacify Heaven and secure excellent customers, gives dinner-parties to the country parish priests

within a distance of twenty miles, and all the curates that lie between, about once a month."

"I daresay they prize him," said Purcell.

"Very highly indeed, he is considered a most religious man."

"Are you going to spend your life here?"

"I should eat my heart out if I did. The bigotry, pettiness, narrow-mindedness of the place suffocates me; the constant reminders of what I should be, and am not, gall me sorely. For years I have been longing to go into the world—America, Australia, England, any place that would afford me an escape from here. We have an old servant, Casey, who has been a soldier. In the days of my boyhood he used to tell me of other countries, foreign cities, strange people, until I became bitter from vexation that fate had imprisoned me here, helpless, looking with longing eyes to distances my clipped wings would not carry me. Now he won't speak of his travels or adventures because he fears to incite me and hasten my departure. But go I shall and soon, where, or what to do, I can't say. I know no trade, I have no money to aid me in studying for a profession; for all that, better a short life abroad than a lingering death here!"

"Is it long since you arrived at this resolution?"

"Only this week I told my father I couldn't stand the place any longer, that I should leave, but he doesn't like the idea. He is selfish, and I am useful to him; he is old, and I am the only one of his kith and kin living, and I suppose he is fond of me after a fashion, and doesn't wish me to leave; but I owe him nothing, he has squandered what should be mine and brought me into the world a pauper; I should have gone away years ago, but better late than never, I suppose, and go I shall."

He pulled down the fishing-cap over his brows,

and looked determinedly at vacancy with bright eyes and flushed cheeks.

"How old are you?" asked Purcell, after awhile.

"I shall soon be one-and-twenty. Not too old, I hope, to 'list, if nothing better offers."

"I have knocked a good deal about the world," said Purcell, "and, if my experience can be of use to you, it is at your service."

Fitzmaurice looked at him for a second, and then said :

"I shall be glad to have a talk with you; I hope we may again."

"I hope so," Purcell answered, rising, and preparing to continue his walk.

Fitzmaurice by this time had disjoined his rod and placed his fishing-bag on his back.

"I must get home," he said; "we dine early."

They shook hands and parted.

"There is something in him I like," said Purcell, watching the tall straight figure striding through the grass. "He has possibilities that may lead to a career, he may become a clever man—but whether a good one or the reverse is quite another thing."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUNSET OF HIS DAYS.

ABOUT half a mile from Grantsborough, by the road leading from the north side of the square, stood a small cottage, divided from the public thoroughfare by a plot of ground, called by courtesy the lawn, a title to which it had lost all claim because planted with potatoes, cabbages, rhubarb, and other vegetables.

This garden was screened from the road by a tall

thick hedge, above which passers-by could merely see the upper part of the house and the top branches of a few apple-trees growing at either side. The inhabitants of Grantsborough regarded the cottage with feelings approaching the mysterious, for none had ever been inside its doors or nearer its walls than the strong, green, wooden door set in a wall where the hedge terminated, since the present owner Ulic Fitzmaurice, his son, and his single servant had taken possession some four years before the story opens.

The existence of Ulic Fitzmaurice indeed might have been regarded as a myth by the goodly inhabitants of Grantsborough, but for the fact that bills were made out in his name, letters occasionally delivered for him, and in the dark of summer evenings a tall, stooped figure was occasionally observed by those who passed the way leaning over the hedge Casey, universally spoken of by the inhabitants of Grantsborough as the Corporal, in accordance with a habit of Irish provincials in bestowing soubriquets,—was an important member of Ulic Fitzmaurice's household. A straight-figured, square-faced man, with grim lines in a kindly face, lighted by merry blue eyes and fenced by straight, stiff whiskers, ending half way down his cheeks, he was regarded favourably by many matrons who would have lured him from his retirement.

In the days of his youth he had served through the Indian Mutiny in an Irish regiment, of which Ulic Fitzmaurice's brother was colonel. On the retirement of the gallant officer, Casey became his valet, nay, his self-appointed guide, philosopher and friend, and only on the death of his master did the Corporal transfer his faithful service to his master's brother.

A type of a goodly race of honest servitors and

faithful friends, now passing into nothingness, and leaving but tradition behind, he united his fate and fortune with those of the master he respected and chided, loved and valued.

From the day he entered his present master's household, he neither received nor expected to receive wages. He prided himself on being a help rather than a burden to the household, and felt an honest satisfaction in drawing a monthly pension he regarded as a grateful if trivial offering for former services, still remembered.

To pay-day he looked forward with happy expectation, as a break in the monotony of existence. On such occasions, soon after his master's early dinner, he marched into town with a bold front, and an airy gait, drew his money, gossiped with the neighbours, treated his friends to pints of beer, over which he retold stories of the world abroad, his colonel's adventures, his own escapes by flood and field, the interest of which had grown somewhat stale by monthly repetitions.

On such days, atoned for by a month of seclusion, he was wont to purchase a bottle of claret for "the masther, in mimory of ould times," provide himself with tobacco sufficient for a month's consumption, supplement his wardrobe by the purchase of a shirt or a pair of boots—bought after much consideration and hard bargaining—and satisfy the requirements of his toilet by a bottle of oil. For aught beyond these, he took as little care as the lilies of the field.

It would be difficult to define what offices he filled, or rather left unfilled in his capacity of general servant. By turns he acted as valet and cook, as butler and housemaid, as nurse and gardener, and be it added, filled these offices entirely to his own satisfaction. In return he was regarded

by his master as an old and privileged friend, who had perfect right to speak his mind on all occasions, a liberty which the Corporal never abused.

When, after his conversation with Purcell, Maurice Fitzmaurice reached the cottage, he pushed open the garden-door, went up the narrow walk leading to the house, and entering the sitting-room, placed his rod in the corner. The apartment had once been painted a pale green colour now brought into strong relief by patches of damp and discolouration, where rain had forced its way through the walls; the floor was covered with a carpet from which the surface had long been worn, leaving bare threads grinning here and there in the very hearts of roses,—a deal table in the centre, a horse-hair sofa propped at one side, and a spindle-legged piano, doing duty as a side-board, together with a few chairs in various stages of dilapidation, completed the furniture of the room.

On the handsome marble chimney-piece was a collection of pipes, tobacco jars, candlesticks, an old champagne-bottle, an empty flask, some fishing gear, cartridges of powder and boxes of percussion caps. The general appearance of the apartment betrayed poverty and slovenliness.

At the window in the sunlight, an old man sat reading a newspaper. His tall figure was painfully thin, his shoulders stooped. His face was yet handsome and dignified, though his bright grey eyes were sunk under bushy eyebrows, and the loss of teeth spoiled the shape of a well-cut mouth; his nose was slightly aquiline, his forehead high and broad, his white hair cut close to his head.

He was dressed in a coat, green with age and worn with service, of a somewhat foreign fashion, edged at the cuffs and collar with fur; a high-standing shirt collar, and a white handkerchief of many folds,

helped to hide his thin neck. His aspect betrayed an air of decay, yet, something of the grace and bearing of a gentleman of the old school clung to him which no reverse could obliterate, and which his present surroundings only helped to define in striking contrast.

When his son entered the room, the old man neither looked up from the paper, nor took notice of him, though it was the first time they had met that day. Maurice looked at his father as it about to speak, standing a little way before him, with hands thrust into the pockets of his short round coat, but Casey entering the room to lay the dinner-table, frustrated his probable intention.

"Caught anything, Masther Maurice?" he asked, spreading the cloth and bustling about preparing for dinner.

"No," said Fitzmaurice, shortly. "I was in no humour for killing trout this morning, nor did they feel inclined to be caught."

The Corporal looked up at him shrewdly, but his young master's face gave no indication of his mind.

"Well sure you'll catch all the more another day, maybe to-morrow," said the Corporal. "God's good, an' the devil is not bad they say, though it's meself have no experience of his dealings, Masther Maurice."

"Perhaps you might have fared better if you had."

"Lord save us no; but at all events it's coming to the end o' the month we'll be in another fortnight, and sure it's glad we'll be, not to speak of that month being June, an' June itself the month of our quarter's pay."

Ulic Fitzmaurice's meagre annuity was paid in quarterly instalments.

"The first of the month is always welcome to those who live from hand to mouth," said Maurice taking up a rifle standing in the corner of the room and examining the barrel.

His father quietly raised his head, and, without moving the position of the newspaper looked at him steadily and unseen.

Any bitterness of tone which the young man's last words expressed glided off the Corporal easily.

"Havin' the gun in your hands reminds me, Masther Maurice, I put down the last o' the hares an' rabbits you shot ere yesterday for our dinner to-day," he said, as if the idea had just occurred to him, and had not haunted his mind all the morning. "Sure the rabbits were young things, an' nothin' on their bones to speak of, for the matter o' that, but I'm told up in the Wilderness they're as thick as the grass, just waitin' for some one like yourself to shoot 'em!"

"Who told you that?"

"Oh, sure it's always the case this time o' year," he replied evasively. "An' ould Sir Lawrence would never give you lave to shoot 'em if he didn't want to keep 'em down, an' not have 'em leapin' an' sportin' about an' destroyin' all around 'em," added Casey, leisurely wiping a knife and placing it with deliberate care on the table.

"Have you no money left?"

"Divil a penny save for the flour I'll get to bake an' milk they won't give me now without payin' down on the nail."

Early in the quarter when Ulic Fitzmaurice received his money, it was invariably handed over to Casey for housekeeping purposes, the old man having deducted a certain sum for a box of cigars, and a half dozen of port, the best Hennessy's estab-

lishment could supply. The Corporal was thoroughly skilled in the outlay of finances, and usually made them cover the household expenses for the ensuing three months.

"Casey," said Maurice, "you have shown yourself a man of many resources as a soldier——"

"That I have," said the Corporal straightening himself and half unconsciously assuming a military air.

"And still more as a civilian," continued Maurice ; "there is one resource however, you have either never thought of, or hadn't the courage to put into execution."

"Now what may that be?" said the old soldier leaning on the table with outstretched arms and looking into his young master's face with the air and sagacity of a terrier.

"Get me a piece of flannel-cloth to clean the barrel of this rifle and I'll tell you."

Young Fitzmaurice looked once more at his father when the Corporal had vanished, but the old man was apparently deep in the contents of the journal, and heedless of what passed around him.

"Now, Masther Maurice, about that resource," said the old soldier returning to the room with the bearing of one about to hold a discussion.

"We pay for milk?" said Maurice looking at him.

"Ay money down. Mrs. Malone, the ould strap, wouldn't give me a pen'orth on credit if me tongue was to dhrop out o' me head from dhryness, an' it's many the lie I tould her sure enough."

"Her cows stand in the fields near us all the night waiting to be relieved, why not have compassion on the poor animals?"

"Oh! Masther Maurice," said the Corporal, looking at him anxiously, puzzled as to whether the words were spoken in jest or earnestness.

"If necessity is the mother of invention, she is also the mother of dishonesty," Maurice replied keeping his eyes lowered.

"Musha are you joking with me?"

"Upon my life," answered the young man, "I don't know. I believe I'd do anything for money; I'm not sure I wouldn't do even what I hinted at. I might feel on the first occasion it was rather mean, but no doubt that foolish sensation would vanish with experience. It is merely circumstances that make an honest man a knave; a fellow with money in his pockets need never steal bread, nor money to buy bread, nor cheat his neighbour, nor rob his creditors; but men are often obliged by fate to do these things, not for pleasures they give them, but rather for the advantage they bring. Now, what do you say, if you and I go out to-night with a dark-lantern and a milk pail?"

"Sure, I know. you're humbugging me, Masther Maurice."

"No, I am now quite serious—at least, I believe I am," he replied.

"Then God forgive you for tempting me anyhow; but devil a bit o' me ever knows when you're speakin' serious an' when you're not."

"I'm often left in like ignorance myself. However, in my present mood I believe that honesty is the worst policy. Everyone robs; the poor man picks a pocket, rich men cheat each other on the exchange or in the market; so that we are all sinners in the sight of Heaven—and I think there is some one rapping at the garden-door."

"So there is," said the Corporal. "Now, I wonder who can it be," he added, reflectively. "I'll swear it's Mrs. Murphy the butcher's wife, with the little bill for a neck o' mutton I bought from her last week, an' sure never a bit of her would give it

t' me on credit but 'twouldn't keep fresh another hour, an' she had hawked it all over the town. May the devil run away with her if she's there."

"Well, you had better go down and see, the door will be smashed in if you remain much longer," Maurice said complacently cleaning his gun.

With words on his lips that did not sound like prayers, the Corporal trod the path planning as he proceeded some means to overcome the enemy. He opened the garden-door cautiously and looked out.

"Oh, then it's you, Mrs. Murphy," he said as if her presence were at that moment an unexpected pleasure, his face was beaming with smiles.

"Sure it is Misther Casey," replied the lady with equal suavity. She was habited in a full dark-blue cloth cloak, the hood of which was thrown back on her shoulders, leaving her head exposed to the air. "I said I'd take a walk over this way to see if I'd see yoursel' an' ask for the few shillin's you owe me, as me husband is goin' t' the fair o' Ballyrogan in the mornin' to buy a few sheep, plaze God."

Mrs. Murphy took up the end of her greasy print apron and wiped her round face repeatedly, as if to indicate she was quite overcome by the exertion of her walk, and so move the Corporal's heart towards satisfying her needs.

"'Deed it's yourself," he began, holding the door firmly in one hand, "that oughtn't to disthress yourself walkin' out half a mile from the town for the sake o' the few shillin's I owe you," (both the Corporal and the lady referred to the bill as if it were the merest trifle to either), "an' I thought o' goin' in t' pay you meself, ay, fifty times this week, but it always went out o' me head."

"Maybe you could give it me now, Misther

Casey," she said, with a mildness which the expression of her eyes strangely contradicted.

"Indeed an' I would," said the Corporal, blandly and with an air of unconcern, "but his honour happens to be fast asleep this minute, he had a dreadful bad night of it with a cough an' never slept a wink till ten o'clock this mornin', nor meself aither for that matter listinin' t' him, an' sure I couldn't think o' wakin' him up for the little sum I owe you."

Mrs. Murphy knew perfectly this was fiction, but she preserved her temper, knowing full well if she spoke her mind, she would probably never receive her debt.

"Oh, dear what'll I do?" she said making another effort to melt the Corporal's stony heart, and looking with all the distress she could summon at a moment's notice into his beaming countenance. "Me husband wants t' buy the sheep t'-morrow an' he's just a trifle short."

"When does he go?" asked the Corporal, with an air of deep consideration which he hoped might have due effect.

"At five o'clock in the mornin'."

"Oh then there's plenty o' time," he said as if suddenly relieved from a difficulty heavily oppressed his mind. "I'll get it for you this evenin' surely, when his honour wakes up an' I'll bring it to you meself."

Mrs. Murphy looked at him for a second with eyes that showed her anger was ready to explode. "You ould schemer, you're the devil's play-boy," she said mentally, but in hopes there might be some truth in his words she said aloud:

"Oh thin if you would Misther Casey, it's mesel' that would be much obliged t' you entirely; for me good man is afther abusin' me twenty times for givin' you the bit o' mate at all."

With this delicate remark she satisfied her wrath for the present, but contemplated giving the Corporal salutary advice when the bill was paid.

"Well I'd be sorry t' give him the chance o' saying another word t' you," said the old soldier gallantly, "trust me you'll have the money to-night."

He shut the gate, and went back to the house muttering to himself.

"I knew it was Mrs. Murphy for the few shillin's I owe her," he said, entering the sitting-room, "the ould strap, I had to promise I'd paid her the money t'-night, but the devil a sight she'll catch o' me in town for the next fortnight."

"Is the dinner ready?" asked Ulic Fitzmaurice, as if he had no interest whatever in the Corporal's statement.

"Sure an' it's the very question I was just goin' t' ask meself sir when you spoke; an' I'll go an' see."

In a few minutes he returned with a dish having at least the merit of being hot and savoury, followed by a couple of dogs, that ran to make friends with their master. Then the Corporal produced two half-pint bottles of Guinness's stout, uncorked and poured their contents into tumblers a trifle cracked and dingy from age and service. The table-cloth was of the coarsest, the dinner-plates of the famous willow-pattern, the forks—of the three-pronged steel design—were shaky in their handles.

Ulic Fitzmaurice stood up and pulled his easy-chair, the seat of which served one of the dogs for a bed by night, to the table. The dish consisting of hares and rabbits boiled with potatoes and onions, required little carving, but Maurice did that little.

"Have you kept your dinner, Casey?" the old man said.

"Yes sir," answered the Corporal with a smile of gratitude, "I've left it behind in the pot."

Casey had often said this before when rations were scarce in the household, and his stomach empty as Mother Hubbard's cupboard. He then retired to the kitchen, divided only from the sitting-room by a narrow flagged passage, leaving the doors purposely open that he might overhear the conversation; this habit was not prompted by prying motives, as was evident by his invariably giving his views on any topic under discussion, shouting them from the recesses of his retreat.

The dinner was eaten in silence for some time, the old man throwing bones occasionally to the dogs, that snarled and growled for right of possession amongst themselves.

"Anything new?" he asked at last, when he had almost finished.

"Yes—there are two events agitating the town to its very centre at present," answered his son. "The Miss Daileys' nephew has come to see them; and 'tis said he has plenty of money."

"Always the talk o' money with Masther Maurice," said the Corporal in the distance, as if speaking to himself.

"He gave me an excellent cheroot to-day, I met him when I was fishing on the banks."

"Miss Daileys' nephew—what is his name?" asked the old man.

"Purcell."

"Of course," said Ulic Fitzmaurice, shaking his head as if he were thinking of the past. "I remember his mother, a very pretty girl who married one of my tenants and went with him to America. Dear me, it must be quite thirty years ago. And her son has come to see his aunts?"

"He has; the second item is Hennessy has got a brougham."

A loud scornful laugh from the kitchen greeted this announcement.

"For hire?" asked the old man quietly, but with a polished sarcasm there was no mistaking; the lines about his face deepened to a sneer, and his upper lip curled scornfully.

"No not for hire but for his wife to drive from her residence at Mount Maurice to her shop-door, isn't it a farce?"

Ulic Fitzmaurice winced at the mention of his old home and his face grew a shade paler than before.

"Well that bates Banagher anyhow," said Casey from the distance.

"I saw the brougham to-day," said Maurice, "I met it on the road driving at a furious pace, the dust it stirred nearly choked me. Young Blake acted as coachman dressed in a livery coat—so big for him you would want a searching warrant to find his body—to complete his attire he wore one of Hennessy's old hats, and a pair of white gloves."

"Damn their impudence!" said the Corporal.

"Have they yet got a crest from the Herald's College?" asked the old man with a cold smile.

"Well, I'm not quite sure."

"With that and a few ancestors bought at an auction they may take their places among the landed gentry," he said bitterly.

"Well why shouldn't they? They have plenty of money no matter how they made it, and that will do everything in these days, and buy a man all he wants, including a ready-made suit of respectability, which has as much virtue in the eyes of the world as the dissenting parson's frock-coat has in the eyes of his congregation," said Maurice, but he spoke as if the words almost choked him.

"Sure the world is comin' to an end entirely," said the Corporal gravely.

"Then Redmond's sons keep horses and follow the hunt, and one of them passed his examination the other day for a surgeon in the Navy."

"The people are mad!" the old man replied leaning back in his chair.

"Then their madness runs in a wise direction."

"It's mane devils they are," remarked the Corporal, "they wouldn't give me a half ton o' coal t'other day unless I paid them money down. It's a shabby lot they sprung from an' sure they'd skin a flea for his hide and tallow."

"The fact is, father," said Maurice, seriously, "I won't stay in this place any longer. I have made up my mind and go I will," he continued, speaking rapidly and vehemently. "I know I have said that before and you persuaded me to stay, but I am determined now."

"I knew t'would come to this some day," said the Corporal.

"I shall be twenty-one in a month or two, and do you wish that I should go on leading this gipsy kind of life always, going out to kill rabbits and to catch fish for our dinner?" he said, his indignation gradually increasing. "What shall I be in a few years—do you ever think of that? What's the use of our old name—we are not lords of the soil any longer, if we take our neighbours' cattle we'll be prosecuted for robbery, like the common humanity around us; people don't care two straws for us now, and we can't get a shilling's credit from those upstarts that sneer and laugh at our poverty and our contrivances to live."

The old man remained silent, merely showing his agitation by rapping his thin fingers on the table.

"I knew 'twould come to this," repeated the Corporal, "but I didn't think 'twould come so soon." He crossed the passage and stood at the doorway of the sitting-room, drawn so far from his place proper by his interest in the young man's words, his voice as he spoke was husky and his honest eyes were troubled as a dog's that has lost his master.

"Where do you want to go?" asked the old man.

"Not far, only to London. I shan't emigrate to America; I don't want to work like a clod, or go behind a desk; nor to Australia—that's out of the world, and I mean to live in the world. I'll go to London, the journey won't be expensive, that's a consideration, and you can give me letters of introduction to people you know—one to Sir Lawrence Usher and one to Lord Harrick—you were a friend of his father's, and he has seventy or eighty thousand a year—and then you know some men in the Government who may do something for me."

"I never yet placed myself under an obligation to anyone," said the old man proudly.

"No but I must; I feel as much humiliated perhaps as you, but I know I must stoop to conquer, and though it may take me years, I mean to conquer somehow."

The old man looked at him suddenly and an unwonted light came into his eyes as if some recollections of his youth and its wealth of promises had flashed quickly on his mind.

"You will let me go freely?" said Maurice; all the bitterness had now gone from his voice. "And you will spare me some money out of next month's payment; it may be all the better for both of us in a short time that I go."

Ulic Fitzmaurice drew his coat tighter round his thin frame as if a sudden breath of cold made him shiver.

"It may be," he answered gently; "perhaps you are right in leaving this place. I shall do what I can."

The Corporal who had long been silent, turned round and left the room suddenly.

"I once read," said Maurice, "that a man can do wonders who believes in himself; I believe in myself, and—and I may make money some day."

The old man gave no reply, but rising, walked to the window and looked out. Maurice took his rifle under his arm and left the room.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE RECTORY GARDEN.

AFTER an early supper that evening, Maurice Fitzmaurice lighted his pipe, and full of thoughts concerning himself and his future took his way across the bridge, walked quickly through the square as if anxious to avoid interruption, and bent his steps towards the road leading from the west side of the town.

The conversation with his father concerning his determination to leave was yet fresh in his mind, and he rejoiced at the prospect of entering the world where he could test his strength and judge of himself by success or failure.

He was heir to a race fallen from its high estate into poverty and obscurity; the bearer of a name which had lost its honours and become associated with a pity harder to bear than contempt. Long ago, in his boyhood, it had been a dream of his that he would one day retrieve the fortunes of his house, and rescue it from the obscurity by some magnificent and heroic coup. But though this wild

idea had passed away, some lingering hope begotten by strong desire remained, that if he could not bring back the place and power his race had lost, he might at least relieve it from the present state of poverty.

He had no settled plan concerning the course he would pursue on leaving Grantsborough. A strong desire to quit a place whose mental atmosphere had become intolerably narrow to his widening mind blinded him to the hardships lying before one flung upon the world with no resources and with untrained abilities. If occasionally he became aware of such difficulties, the confidence he gathered from some undefined sense of his own power gave him strength to meet and hope to conquer them.

He had heard of the great rewards America offers to merit, but the country held no attraction for him. A fascination which might prove fatal led him to select London as the scene of his struggles, perhaps the arena of his triumphs. He was aware politics led most of his countrymen to distinction, but alas! he had no talent for political life, and few patriotic feelings. As yet ignorant of the forgetfulness of great men regarding their fallen fellows, his great hope lay in the fact that some of his father's old friends might help him to place or position.

If ever he succeeded, he felt certain it would not be as a hewer of wood or a drawer of water, but rather in some capacity where his brain and not his hands would find work; where adroitness would take the place of labour, and tact supersede merit.

"Had I lived a few centuries ago, I would have been a wily courtier. I should prefer playing such a rôle to that of a great warrior; as the latter I might have served my country, but as the former I should certainly have served myself," he thought.

So far as his limited experience stretched he was not without having foundation for faith in himself. Nature had endowed him with good looks and shapeliness, volubility and tact. Moreover he was gifted with a subtle power of attraction. A surface sympathy in his manner readily set itself in unison with the feelings and quickly reflected the moods of those who approached him. He made many friends. Yet by nature cold, and through habit calculating, he had little place in his life for the interests, friendships or affections he frequently inspired, for in his heart he had set an idol made to his own image and likeness, and no space existed there for pictures such as other men frame and sometimes hold dearer than life. Before this idol he would, necessity requiring, sacrifice all that dreamers hold tender or true; that he might gain the wealth and power which should have been his, he would hold all bonds light as thistle-down.

"Had I lived in mediæval times I would have sold my soul to the devil for gold and fame; but the poor old devil is dead, or having fallen into disrepute amongst the virtuous and learned, is known under the *nom de guerre* of Ambition," he said.

As he proceeded he smiled complacently at thoughts passing through his mind, then suddenly looking forward as if expecting some pleasant familiar object, and quickened his steps. By this time he had arrived at the rectory, a grey square house built on an elevation, with a grassy lawn sloping to the road, from which it was divided by a wall, low within, several feet high from without. Just above this wall as Fitzmaurice looked, he caught sight of a girl's face turned towards him and in another minute he was smiling into the flushed countenance bent above him, and reaching to touch the hand stretched down for him to clasp in his own.

"I'm afraid I am late," he said.

Her whole countenance brightened at the sound of his voice.

"You are, but what does it matter now you have come?" she answered.

"I have something to tell you," he added with the impatience of youth, "something about myself."

Her heart gave a flutter, but she strove to calm herself.

"Come into the garden," she said.

"Thanks," he answered, "it is always pleasanter there."

The rectory garden was more useful than ornamental, or in other words, flowers vanished in favour of vegetables. At the entrance indeed were a few beds where peonies, narcissi, tulips, and mignonette flourished, protected by borders of stout box-wood; but the centre was chiefly devoted to the growth of potatoes. At the end stood a large hen-coop, where generations of fowls strutted to and fro and rested themselves in the one-leg attitude, and close by were poles supporting ropes on which the household linen was wont to dry on the earlier days of the week.

Yet with its high red brick walls, its broad paths moss-grown and semi-neglected, bordered by strawberry beds and sheltered by broad-branched apple and pear trees, its quaintly-shaped summer house, around which early roses grew and grouped, it had a certain picturesqueness and blending of colours which many well-trimmed gardens lacked.

As Madge Rochford the Rector's only daughter, and Fitzmaurice entered the place; the mysterious semi-light of a spring evening crept over the sky, westward a saffron glow marked where the sun had gone down behind clouds of purple and gold an hour ago; birds practised summer songs for the last time

before retiring to rest, and from hedge-rows where the faint green was gradually deepening, came faint odours of early violets.

"How charming is this garden," said the girl looking round, unconscious it was only his presence tinted the whole world with colour and glory and beauty begotten of happiness.

Fitzmaurice looked at her olive-complexioned oval face, crowned by bright brown hair, and lighted by eyes in whose depths tender feelings and possibilities of passion lay reflected. The pleasure of seeing him flushed her cheeks, rippling smiles of happiness played round her mobile lips. How handsome, joyous, charming she looked! In contemplating her he forgot himself, but not for long.

"It is a quaint old place," he said, in answer to her words, "and I shall always remember it, whether I am near or far, it will be always associated in my mind with you."

They were walking up and down one of the broad paths, above which the boughs of apple and pear trees thick with blossoms almost met.

A happy light came into her eyes as he spoke.

"I recollect," she said, standing for a moment, "it was here you strove to teach me to play at peg-top, but I could never learn; you used to take them up on your hand and place them in mine whilst they were spinning."

"Since then it seems like an age, and yet in reality it is only a few years ago."

"Only a few years," she repeated thoughtfully, "then I went to school——"

"And grew from a child almost to a woman, and when you came back, he seemed changed in some way we could not understand." Both were silent; then he added rapidly, as if anxious to change the course their conversation had taken, "I

have been thinking a good deal about my future lately, and to-day I have come to a resolution."

"Yes," she said listening earnestly, anxious to hear more."

"And I have told my father," he went on, as if continuing the train of his own thoughts, rather than his conversation with her, "that I must leave Grantsborough."

She glanced at him swiftly. Colour died from her face. He stared straight before him, either wholly unconscious or heedless of the effect of his communication.

"I have grown sick of the place, and can stand my idle life no longer," he continued.

A new thought flashed across her mind that immediately shaped itself into words :

"But you are not going to—to——"

"America," he said, his quick ear catching that little quiver which in a woman's voice will oftentimes reveal more than words can tell. "Not I," he replied more gently. "People say this continent is used up, that young men should go abroad, but I prefer seeking my fortune in London: it has always had an attraction for me, and I daresay I shall be able to push myself into some quiet corner there, and wait till an opportunity comes for me to play my part."

He spoke with easy assurance, as if his future was mapped out according to his desires.

"When do you intend leaving?" she asked, though the words grated on her ears, she felt as if she must ask the question, must know how many days of happiness yet remained to her.

"At the beginning of June; I cannot get away until my father receives his quarterly payment," he replied with a short unpleasant laugh, "then I'm off to tumble on my head or my heels, to get buf-

eted about or petted, according to the wishes of my mistress—Fate.”

“How can you talk so recklessly about yourself?” he girl said, gravely.

“Because I think there are ten chances to one in favour of my coming on my heels, though I have not the slightest idea of what I may first do when I arrive in the modern Babylon. Perhaps I may become a music-hall singer—I have heard there are some Irishmen in the profession who make about forty pounds a week; or I may turn the handle of a barrel-organ and an honest penny at one and the same time, or strive to sell matches in the streets, and if I don’t succeed eat the lucifer-heads off my stock-in-trade, and be heard of no more. What a sublime exit from the land of the Saxon tyrant for the last of the Fitzmaurices!”

They both laughed, although his words jarred on her ear.

“How glad I shall be to get away from a place that reminds me of our poverty, and from the people with their pinchbeck respectability,” he said contemptuously; “I’m sick of it all. For a man it is only a waste of life to remain here; the dulness of such an existence would by degrees creep into my mind. I want to mix with the world, and feel its pulse, to experience the feelings and excitements that agitate it, to taste the fulness of life which only those living in large cities can know. I may get knocked down and run over, and have to rise up unassisted, and limp on again with the crowd; but I would rather do that in London than live in luxury here.”

She listened, believing that his utterances contained precious words of wisdom.

“The sham gentility and genuine vulgarity of my neighbours are something disgusting. Take

for example these bank clerks, they were asked to drink tea the other evening at Hanlon's, the people who keep a hardware shop. Hanlon is a sensible honest man, his wife is a good-natured foolish woman, who regarding bank clerks as fringe hanging to the skirts of society asked them to tea. They went of course, and the Misses Hanlon who have just left a convent school played, sang, and entertained them ; and these fellows without two ideas in their heads, came into the billiard-room of the hotel next night, and spoke of going to Hanlon's in a patronising way, passed comments on their host and hostess and laughed at their daughters, until I felt that if I didn't go away I couldn't help kicking them. This is a specimen of the society one has to endure in such a place as this, or keep to oneself."

"But they are not all like that."

"They are more or less, and I should become one of them if I remained here much longer ; but I'm glad there is no possibility of that."

He was only thinking of his escape, she was considering on the void in her life his absence would create.

"How lonely," she said, lowering her eyes and involuntarily sighing, "your father and old Casey and all your friends will be when you are gone !"

"Ay, I suppose they will for a few weeks," he answered cheerfully ; "but soon they will get over it, and go on again as if I never had a place in their lives,"

"How can you say that ?" she said raising her head.

He turned and looked at her, and caught the half-reproachful half-appealing glance in her eyes.

"Because," he answered gravely believing his words true, "I have not much faith in the durability of human affections. We stay in the memory

of our friends until the first ripple of time removes our image, just as a name we write on the sands remains until the first wave washes over and obliterates it, and this is a wise law."

"I cannot think you speak as you feel," she said to him almost imploringly.

"Indeed I do."

"There are some persons," she said looking away, for a mist was gathering in her eyes, "who never forget."

He watched her narrowly, fully understanding the meaning of her words, and noting a faint colour gradually deepening on the pale olive of her cheeks. A feeling partaking both of sorrow and gratitude touched and softened him.

"I am not worthy of a place in her memory," he thought. Then he said aloud:

"If people forget me I will come back and write my name again on their memories—at least on the memories of those for whom I care."

"If they care for you, there will be no need of writing your name afresh; it will be always with them," she answered without raising her eyes.

"That may be," he said carelessly striking a bough and bringing down a shower of apple blossoms on their heads. One of them caught in her hair and hung above her forehead; he put out his hand and removed it, as he did so he noticed her face grow rosy in the fading light.

"The time will not be long before I come back again for a holiday—I suppose I shall take one annually," he said, striving to speak carelessly, "and a year is a short time."

"Time runs differently with those who depart and those who remain," she answered.

"Ay, I often noticed his irregularities. I suppose he gets occasionally tired of racing with people who

have pleasant lives and plenty of money, and then by way of change lags slowly enough with those who have none of these delightful things to oil the wheels of his chariot."

After this they were silent some minutes, both busy with their own thoughts. The birds had silenced their songs, all light but that of stars had faded from the sky, silence and peace crept over the world. When they next came to the end of the path, they turned by mutual consent to the gate.

"We have always been such old friends," said Fitzmaurice, "ever since we were children, that I hope we shall never forget each other."

She looked up swiftly and said :

"I shall never forget you."

The words broke from her involuntarily, and then came a pause, which they both felt to be awkward. He made haste to answer her though not quite sincerely.

"I shall always think of this promise you have made me. You are far kinder to me than I deserve."

Then, having left the garden, they shook hands, and he refusing her invitation to come into the rectory, hurriedly walked down the pathway leading to the road.

"She is a woman who would care for a man in the sunshine or the storm of his existence," he said, "a sweet, loveable girl ; but yet I have my way to make in the world, and I have no room in my life for love."

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF HIS LIFE.

IN passing homeward over the bridge, Fitzmaurice caught sight of a tall, broad-shouldered figure leaning on the grey stone ledge, looking down on the water flowing below between the arches.

Fitzmaurice recognizing Purcell went over and spoke to him.

"I always like to think, smoke, and walk by night," said the latter; "they are three things which a man can do far better than by day."

"If you have been thinking I have interrupted you," said Fitzmaurice.

"You were in my thoughts, and seeing you suddenly is like realizing them quickly."

Purcell took his pipe from his mouth, knocked the ashes on the parapet, and refilled it as if the process were an art.

"From what you told me yesterday morning, I feel interested in you," he said, looking at Fitzmaurice. "My reason for this interest is partly because the study of character is one of my greatest pleasures," he added.

"Indeed!" said Fitzmaurice, not quite satisfied that the study of his character should afford anyone pleasure.

"There is no life which does not teach its lesson."

"I fear I cannot learn any from those about me."

"Perhaps not, because they are so familiar to you, they cease to impress, just as the sight of a

picture continually before us makes us regardless of its details. I have been all my lifetime mixing with different people, living in various places, and so I always have fresh subjects before me. When my father died in New York, he left some money. I was at that time at Harvard University, and had not made up my mind regarding the profession I should follow. I went to live in Boston, and became acquainted with many of the literary men there, through Ralph Waldo Emerson whom I knew well. I then determined to follow the literary calling—it does not yet rank as a profession in the eyes of the world, though we who follow it choose to call it such. I wrote a couple of novels which were successful, then I went to Chicago, from there to Italy, and afterwards to that city called the Paradise of Americans—Paris.”

“Did you like it?”

“Immensely. I settled there for a couple of years, writing whenever I felt an inclination, for happily my income enables me to indulge in idleness when in no humour for work. I next went to London, where I stayed for a year.”

“I didn’t know you wrote novels,” said Fitzmaurice, looking at him as if expecting to find some change in his appearance viewed by the light of this new knowledge.

“Well, I write what some remarkably enlightened and deeply intellectual persons call light literature,” he said, with a pleasant laugh. “I only wish they knew what heavy labour is necessary to produce even an indifferent book, the amount of careful thought it requires, the concentration of purpose necessary to group characters, work out a plot week after week, month after month, find dialogue and action sufficient to fill the required nine hundred pages, and yet for the writer to keep an interest

alive in his story, though he must know the ultimate fate awaiting his people in the last chapter."

"It must be difficult."

"A young lady once informed me it was the easiest thing in life to write a novel; I asked her to try it, and she did, but never got beyond the third chapter."

"To me," said Fitzmaurice, "when I read a book, it all seems as if it came spontaneously to the author—as if it were woven from the first chapter to the last without a break."

Puycell laughed.

"You may as well think an artist painting a landscape began at the sky-line, and painted downwards inch by inch until he came to the last blade of grass. No, it is rather like a mosaic pavement, put together slowly bit by bit, colour blending with colour, piece fitting into piece, until the whole harmonious design is worked out."

"You like fiction?"

"Yes; but when I work it ceases to be fiction, and becomes reality to me; all my characters I draw from life, altering them slightly, and changing their circumstances, that they may not recognise themselves. Then I try to make them act as I feel certain they would in real life in certain situations. This has given offence to some excellent people, who would fain ignore human nature as quite unworthy of them."

"You tell me you stayed in London, it's a capital of whose ways we know little, though comparatively near it."

"Of course not; here men's lives are narrowed down to one little round; there, in a city counting among its population inhabitants of every country on the globe, a man if he wishes can have an

almost limitless experience of humanity and its way."

"Shall you return to London?"

"Yes, I have merely run over to see my relations here. I have been intending to do so since I set foot on English soil, but I never could manage to get away until now."

"I long for the freedom and opportunities of a great city, and Fate beckons me to London. In an arena so vast, amongst a people so numerous I may find some occupation suited to me."

"You are right in your determination to seek your fortune; but remember, in great cities crowds are so mighty and merciless, that many of those pressing forward in the ranks are stricken down and trampled to death."

"Better march, if only for a little while, shoulder to shoulder with your fellows and fall in the ranks, than drag on an existence where energy is powerless, and hope is fettered. Better fifty years of Europe, says Tennyson. London is my Europe. Only let me have a fair start," he continued, his eyes brightening, "and I promise I shall not be last in the race."

"Why London more than Edinburgh, New York, Boston?"

"I don't know. Perhaps, because the best of everything worth possessing is to be found in the English capital; wealth, rank, statesmanship, genius; the heads of the people are there, the heart of the world throbs there. It stirs my blood to think I shall soon be one of its populace."

"Don't look at London life through rose-coloured glasses, my friend. Nowhere on earth is misery more bitter, are reverses more tragic, is poverty more cruel, or crime more rampant than in London town. There, struggle and death become fellows; youth

and despair make friends. The glare of prosperity covers the surface of a chaos blacker with grief, more rife with suffering, than man has painted hell."

"No matter what awaits me there, go I must," replied Fitzmaurice.

The night was so calm that during the pauses of their conversation they could hear sounds of sheep-bells in the meadows, and the murmur of the river falling through the old brown weir a little way below the bridge. The sky was cloudless and thick with stars.

"I am going for a walk," said Purcell, as he put his pipe in its case—"will you come?"

"With pleasure," Fitzmaurice answered.

When they had proceeded a few yards, the latter said :

"Your life has been rather eventful."

"I have moved about a good deal."

"I wonder," said Fitzmaurice, with the pardonable egotism of youth, "if mine will ever be so. All my years up to this time have been, I believe, but a prelude to my life, a long prelude it has proved."

"You will have all the more experience and sense to start with," answered Purcell.

"Since I saw you I have made up my mind to leave in June; I told my father so to-day."

"Where do you intend going?"

"To London," said Fitzmaurice.

Purcell laughed, and Fitzmaurice looked at him curiously.

"London has a wonderful magnetism for men and women who live by their brains; notwithstanding that England in the past sought by every means in her power to rub out all traces of art and literature in Ireland, two-thirds of the names dis-

tinguished in these pursuits are Irishmen and Irishwomen. This statement was likewise true of the earlier part of the century when Moore, Lady Morgan, Maclise, Miss O'Neill, Miss Farren, afterwards Countess of Derby, James Barry, Lady Blessington, Samuel Lover, and others whom I cannot now call to mind, lived in the English capital."

"How is it talent seldom remains in this country?" asked Fitzmaurice, inclined to regret he had lingered in his native land so long.

"I don't quite know; probably because here it is neglected and overlooked, whilst England offers such inducements to emigrate as liberal payment, a recognised station, and cultured society; for England is wise in knowing that clever men, no matter of what nationality, help to render the country they reside in great."

"I am afraid," said Fitzmaurice, jestingly, "that I shall scarcely add to its greatness."

"Do you intend devoting yourself to literature?"

"No; at least I think not, for I have no literary talent. Indeed I scarcely know what I shall do, save present some letters of introduction that my father will give me to his friends."

"I don't wish to discourage you," said Purcell, "But I believe friends are the worst people in life to depend on; that is a lesson you will probably learn soon; this is very hard when we consider that a word of advice from them, or the exertion of interest—things costing them nothing—would sometimes serve as a friendly hand held out to a drowning man."

"I don't mean to depend on them, I shall rely on myself, but I will also try to make them useful to me if I can. I must do something to live, and I should have begun long ago."

"It is not too late yet," said Purcell, kindly. "I am sorry you have never striven to write, I could give you letters to men I know who would help you if they possibly could."

"You are very good, but I have never tried my 'prentice hand at the work. My father let me grow up without concern regarding my future, he would as soon have sent me to break stones on the road-side as given me any profession, except that of a soldier, and that was out of the question. He would not have minded much if I neither knew how to read nor write ; but, fortunately for me, an eccentric old man, a retired physician who lived in the cottage we now occupy, took some interest in me, taught me a smattering of classic lore, some of the modern languages, and gave me a taste for English literature. Poor old Dr. Martin he is now dead, but I'll never forget the debt I owe him."

"Your father is not an exception to Irish parents as a general rule," said Purcell. "I have heard how many of them let their families grow up without helping them to a choice of employment or profession, willing they should stay at home, actuated by carelessness and that disinclination to severance which is characteristic of the Celt. This is one of the reasons why there are so many of your countrymen engaged in literature."

"Because they have been neglected ? "

"Not exactly ; but literature requires little special training, through wanting vivid imagination and fluency—two gifts Irishmen almost always possess ; they take kindly to literature which serves as a refuge from physical labour or business which they detest and despise."

"I didn't know that," said Fitzmaurice, "but I have never thought of entering business or of working."

"No—you want some employment where your mind will be called into active service," Purcell suggested.

"Yes," he replied thoughtfully.

"Englishmen, on the contrary, delight in commerce; I don't wish to disparage Irishmen for not having the same disposition—every nation will have its peculiarities. The Irish are a race full of fine feelings and inbred gentleness; in almost every peasant there is a sense of courtesy which comes to him as an instinct, a chivalrous feeling towards women which may be vainly looked for in a Saxon of much higher social standing. Then they are born artists, with an innate love for beauty of form and colour, poetry and music, and so they readily succeed in art."

"I would add they are born actors, for they are never so well pleased as when deceiving their neighbours by exaggeration," said Fitzmaurice.

"Their boastfulness, want of truth, and general over-statements are blemishes peculiar to a highly imaginative race. Then their sense of humour is fine, and surpasses their wit."

"Yes; but I am afraid the mock gentility of the middle classes is killing the old humour, it is now considered rather vulgar."

"I hope not, but it's true one doesn't hear so much of it as formerly."

"I'll tell you a story I heard the other day. Up in the mountains above five miles from Grantsborough, there's a village named Ballyrogan, where an old parish priest Father Ned Reilly lives. He is one of the old school, tells a good story now and then, and likes his glass of punch hot and strong after dinner. He always calls to see my father when he comes down to sing mass for the dead, and

they have a chat about past times, though I'm afraid his brethren don't hold him in high repute for such friendliness. Well, whilst he was preaching to his flock a couple of months ago, he warned them against singing certain ballads, to which he took objection, that had been introduced to his parishioners by a travelling pedler. 'They're as dirty as the devil himself,' says Father Ned from the altar. 'I won't name them to you; you all know the songs I mean, and sure if you don't, I'll whistle them to you,' and he whistled the airs for them there and then."

"That's capital," said Purcell. "I think I'll make an excursion into the mountains to see Father Ned."

When they parted that night after their walk Purcell said:

"I hope I may see you soon again; I am always at home in the afternoon."

"Then I shall give you an early call, perhaps tomorrow. Good-night."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISS DAILEYS' TEA PARTY.

SEVERAL times during the next fortnight Fitzmaurice saw and had long conversations with Purcell concerning his future, and more particularly about London, of which he was never tired of hearing. On the last evening he was to spend in Grantsborough for some time, he dined with the Miss Daileys and Purcell.

Aunt Allie suggested that on this occasion they should "ask in a few young people to drink tea in the evening," and, Aunt Maria agreeing, the three eldest Miss Lawlors, Dr. Fowler, Madge Rochford,

and Mr. Smith—a young bank clerk—were bidden for seven o'clock.

All invited accepted the invitation, and many preparations were made by them. The Miss Lawlors practised the choicest musical selections of their limited programme on their somewhat wooden-toned piano, because Aunt Allie had hinted when giving her unceremonious verbal invitation, her nephew was fond of music. The doctor mentally overlooked his stock of gossiping conversation and permissible tales of patients, to be produced when he had carefully led the way by various questions and fragmentary suggestions.

But Aunt Allie was busiest of all. She had the linen crumb-cloth taken from the drawing-room carpet which, after fifteen years was exposed in its primitive freshness, revealing the glory of scarlet roses winding into impossible wreaths, and green branches of a species unknown to botanists, shaping themselves into systematic order. The white covers were taken from the damask-seated chairs; the lower parts of the window-curtains were relieved from their holland bags, in which they had been long confined; and fresh flowers were placed in vases ornamenting each side of the marble chimney-piece.

When the guests were seated in comfortable fashion round the solid mahogany centre-table, the quaint old room lost much of its primness and donned an air of sociability; Aunt Maria thought it reminded her of the calm familiar face of some old friend that a smile had brightened to unwonted cheerfulness.

She sat at the head of the table, before an old-fashioned copper urn, pouring tea into cups of egg-shell china of great rarity and priceless value. Aunt Allie sat at the foot dispensing seed-cake made from a famous recipe.

Mr. Smith, who had scarce merged from his teens, sat beside Aunt Allie. His light hair was closely cut, oiled with a liberal hand, and carefully brushed; he had evidently a well-regulated head, judging from the exterior view, every single hair being in its proper place, from which it never ventured to stray; his eyes were round and blue, and when he was suddenly addressed, colour rushed into his cheeks.

Much to his embarrassment, one of the Miss Lawlors sat opposite him, who seemed ready to giggle whenever their eyes met. These three young ladies had dark hair, noses inclined to upward views, mouths raw and unfinished, as if Nature had not time to perfect these features before sending their respective owners into the world. Still their faces pleased from their bright good-natured expressions, and the sense of humour that occasionally shot from their eyes when they spoke.

The eldest sat next Purcell, chattering lightly, a fact for which he was thankful, as it gave him an opportunity, whilst he pretended to listen, of watching Madge Rochford. She was talking quietly to Aunt Maria, and answering almost in monosyllables the conversation addressed to her now and then by Fitzmaurice, who sat at her left hand.

Purcell had heard her spoken of continually, but never seen her until now. He had not addressed half a dozen words to her after their formal introduction, nor did he now feel any desire to speak to her; it was enough to see her; he felt he could sit and stare half through the night at a face that was one of the loveliest pictures with which Nature had ever gladdened his sight.

He could hear Fitzmaurice keeping up a rattling conversation with her and one of the Miss Lawlors, into which Dr. Fowler occasionally thrust himself,

but Purcell noticed Miss Rochford said little, listened attentively to Fitzmaurice, and changed colour when he referred to his departure.

Dr. Fowler was a man at the sunny side of forty, with a heavy round face whose complexion gave evidence of the consumption of more beer than was necessary for stimulating appetite. His shoulders were broad, his chest deep, the lower part of his waistcoat was strained to button over and suppress his portly person. His legs were short and thick, and when he walked his movements somewhat resembled a game-cock strutting across a poultry-yard of which he was lord and master.

The doctor was however a man of considerable consequence, not only in his own opinion but in that of a large section of the community of Grantsborough; and he spoke with the air of one not given to under-estimate his qualities.

He was a bachelor who must assuredly one day go the way of most doctors, and marry, as some of his neighbours—mothers who had borne many daughters—hoped; he was also considered a rising man, socially, not physically, and laid claim to patronize literature and art, as evident from the facts that he subscribed to the circulating library in the county town, and had chalk busts of Byron and Burns above his hall door, notwithstanding that the former was looked upon with more than doubtful favour by many of his friends, to whose ears the poet's name flavoured of immorality.

"If," said the medical man, who had waited for a general silence in order that his words might have the full effect due to them—"If you see Sir Lawrence in town, remember me to him kindly."

This was addressed to Fitzmaurice, but intended to impress his hearers generally.

To the inhabitants of Grantsborough there was

but one Sir Lawrence in the knightage and baronetage of Great Britain; to them the surname of Usher was unnecessary. He was their lord and master, and the owner of Usher Park House, where he resided for a couple of months every three or four years.

"I shall," Fitzmaurice said in answer to the medical man's request.

"You will find Sir Lawrence a capital fellow," continued the doctor who liked to roll the baronet's name about in his mouth as a child does a sweetmeat, for he was a rank Conservative, and firmly believed with a simple faith in the divinity of kings and omnipotence of titles.

"I hope so," replied Fitzmaurice, drily.

"When I was in town last season I called on him," continued Fowler, "and he actually made me leave my hotel and take up my quarters with him in St. James's Square whilst I was staying in London!"

"How kind!" said Aunt Maria, credulously. "What a dear old gentleman."

The Misses Lawlor exchanged signal glances across the table; they had frequently heard the doctor make this statement which, after the first fiftieth repetition had become slightly monotonous.

"You have not seen him, Mr. Purcell?" said the medical man who, in speaking, usually contracted his brows in a frown, as if bringing the full weight of his judgment on his utterance.

"I believe I have," said Purcell, with a smile which the doctor failed to catch.

"In London of course?"

"Yes, I dined with him at the American minister's."

Dr. Fowler almost let the cup he was about raising to his lips fall in astonishment. Here was

a man whom he had felt inclined to patronise, a writer of light literature "and all that sort of thing," dining with a minister of state and meeting Sir Lawrence, whom the doctor in some way regarded as a kind of stage property, meant to heighten the effect of his importance in the eyes of his neighbours. He could have got over the fact of the ministerial dinner, because the giver thereof represented a republic, and republics in his opinion were bad form—rather vulgar indeed—but the idea of Purcell meeting the only baronet the stout little man knew, was a matter that completely overpowered him.

He mentally resolved he would cultivate Purcell's acquaintance, he had heard that literary men went into the best society in London, but he never believed such a thing possible until now. He however recovered himself before another subject could be started, and said:

"Sir Lawrence goes about a good deal; he did at least whilst I was with him," emphasising the last phrase from which he expected an inference to be drawn that the baronet had gone into society for Dr. Fowler's sake. "You found him of course a very intelligent man."

"Not particularly," Purcell replied.

Fowler started and looked up quickly at the sound of this rank heresy; but after a moment's consideration thought he would judiciously veer the conversation to his own merits.

"Oh! Sir Lawrence took a great interest in me, wanted me to live in town permanently; he would have procured me a medical appointment—something under government," he added vaguely, "that would have made it worth while remaining, but London didn't agree with my health."

Miss Lawlor who shrewdly suspected this was a

mere invention, said quietly, as she looked into his round face :

"You don't look as if you were in a consumption," at which remark her sisters laughed, and Aunt Maria smiled covertly behind her urn.

"More tea, dear," the old lady said to Madge—"just half a cup—no—and you, dears," to the Misses Lawlor, "no. Well, Richard, will you ring the bell and we shall have the things removed—how long the evenings are getting, and how warm."

Everyone agreeing to this fact readily, as they did to most of her assertions, Aunt Maria smiled placidly, clasped her lace-mittened hands together and lay back in her chair.

From the garden outside, the faint odour of lilies of the valley, tulips, and laburnum, and from the meadows beyond, the scent of new-mown hay, came into the room through the open windows ; a purple haze crept over Brandon mountain, and the first pale stars came out gleaming faintly against a background of green sky.

Presently the wax candles, in old-fashioned silver sconces and heavy plated candlesticks were lighted.

"Miss Allie," said Madge, "I want you to do me a favour."

"Dear child what is it ?"

"Will you promise to grant it first ?"

"If I can," replied Aunt Allie smiling at her old favourite.

"You can ; I want you to play us one of those old sonatas that were fashionable when you were a girl."

"Madge dear, how can you ask me ?"

"Do Aunt Allie," said Purcell, and all the others joining in the request, she prepared to comply.

The piano stood in one of the corners of the room, a half-square, thin-legged instrument devoid of modern improvements, its keys yellow with time, its key-board painted at each side with pictures of cupids hopelessly entangling their stout limbs in wreaths of flowers. Fitzmaurice carried over a couple of candlesticks and placed them on the piano, some one else found a massively bound book of faded music, and then Aunt Allie smiling though nervous, put on her gold-rimmed spectacles, and prepared herself for the task.

She was quite a picture, her tall thin figure clad in dark silk, her old-fashioned deep lace collar fastened by the brooch containing the portrait of her grandfather in a red coat and bag-wig, her thin gold chain fastened at the neck and ending at the waist, her pale handsome face smiling placidly.

On her long white fingers she wore rings belonging to a past generation, that sparkled as she struck the chords of the mellow-toned old instrument and executed wonderful scales. The piece was called "The Romance of Flora," and was dedicated, as the title-page set forth with many intricate flourishes, to "Her Grace, Henrietta, Duchess of Dewshire, most worthy patroness of those arts which her beauty alone is sufficient to inspire."

When Aunt Allie's fingers had ceased to flutter over the keys, and paused for a moment in bringing out the final chord, Purcell asked her to play "The Battle of Prague," at which request she smiled, for this good old piece she had learned in the days of her youth, had practised ever since, and now played with considerable vigour, sounding the drums, the roar of cannon, the groans of the wounded, and the cries of victory, with special emphasis.

Her execution of the famous piece over, she rose up with a flush of pleasure from the music-stool.

Aunt Maria, asked Miss Lawlor to sing.

"With pleasure," answered that young lady, who spoke rapidly, and had the reputation of being smart, "though I fear I won't convey that feeling to my hearers."

"Now don't fish for compliments," said one of her sisters.

"I never do Carrie," she answered. "You know Mr. Quinn of the bank—the young man who wears paper collars," she said, by way of an aside to Purcell. "Well; he lodged opposite us and used to hear us practise, and he said we had voices like penny whistles. Dr. Fowler told us."

"Oh! yes, he did, 'pon my word," said the doctor, with the consciousness of a man who has done his friend a good service in a delicate way.

"I'm not sure that it's quite untrue about our voices," continued the lively Miss Lawlor. "People never hear themselves as others hear them, to give a new rendering to an old saying; friends will always ask one to sing no matter how atrocious one's voice may be, from kindness, of course, and not to laugh at you when you have gone."

"Of course not," said Fowler, pulling his moustaches as he spoke; in the simplicity of his heart he was quite unconscious of the irony contained in the lady's speech.

"When I was on a visit in Tipperary last winter I used to meet two old ladies who invariably brought their music with them, and always strove to sing bass, it was torture to hear them, yet they were always pressed to sing."

"And their friends laughed at them?" said Purcell inquiringly.

"How could they help it? you would also if you had been there."

"But I should not have asked them."

"Then you would have grievously offended them."

"So there was no other alternative?"

"No," said Miss Lawlor, who always contrived to have the last word.

After this she sat down to the old-fashioned piano and commenced her song, "Always Together," in a loud, showy voice that had no music in its notes, throwing back her head with sudden jerks and fixing her eyes on a wool-worked picture hanging above the instrument, representing Judith holding the head of Holofernes in one hand, and a dagger dripping with red floss silk in the other, a relic of Aunt Allie's schooldays.

Purcell did not pay much attention to the song; he stood by the far window half in shadow letting his eyes rest on Madge Rochford. She was sitting under one of the silver sconces, whose light fell on her brown hair and clear pale face, lending fresh effect to her natural beauty.

"I never expected to find a face in this place like hers," he said to himself, "and yet why not; 'tis only in Arcadia a woman could have such an expression, for the charm of her face comes from a beauty born of the soul. How wonderful her eyes are; I have never seen anything like them."

When Miss Lawlor's song was finished, her sisters were after much pressing and many refusals on their part which they sincerely hoped would not be accepted, induced to play a duet. So they crashed and banged through the performance until the instrument reverberated and the strained wires threatened to snap from the unaccustomed roughness of the treatment received. Meanwhile those in the room continued their conversation, Miss Lawlor setting the example of this polite inattention.

"What a showy piece the girls are playing!"

"Very," said Purcell feeling inclined to put his hands to his ears.

"Carrie plays very well, doesn't she?"

"She has indeed a remarkable touch."

"You will forget us all when you go away," continued Miss Lawlor to Fitzmaurice lowering her voice to a semi-sentimental tone.

"Indeed I can never do that," he replied, but to her ears his words had quite a different meaning from that in his mind.

"And when will you come back?"

"Heaven only knows!" he replied carelessly, but Madge Rochford sitting near overheard him and the lines in her sensitive face contracted for a second in sudden pain.

"Well," said Miss Lawlor, "I don't wonder at your going away from Grantsborough. I should if I were a man, but as I'm a woman I suppose I must stay here where Nature placed me like a stone on a hill. I sometimes think it's terrible to be alive at all, and wish I never had been born, this is such a horrid dull town with no society."

"Whose fault is that?" asked Purcell.

"Well our own I suppose. We are all too grand or not grand enough for each other, and we cannot rise above class prejudice. There are the Kellys the brewers, who won't call on Mrs. Delahunt the agent's wife, and Mrs. Delahunt considers herself too superior to recognise the existence of Mrs. Pender Pender whose husband is a lawyer; the steps of the social stair are definitely marked, and we all suffer more or less from want of common intercourse."

"I should have said common sense," remarked Purcell.

"The whole lot," said Fitzmaurice, "should be put into a gigantic barrel, get well shaken and

mixed when required, like a dose of medicine and they would be a dose indeed."

"Provincial society is always contracted," said Purcell, "because its sympathies are not awakened by the ways and needs of large populations."

"But the great ones amongst us," remarked Miss Lawlor, not quite understanding him and anxious to continue her conversation, "are not half so nice in their views of social distinction as the shopkeepers, their grandeur is something overwhelming."

"Heaven defend us," said Purcell laughing.

"Mrs. Hennessy whose husband keeps a grocery shop won't speak to Mrs. Hanlon who is the wife of a hardware merchant; Mrs. Hanlon in turn will not notice the Burkes the bakers; and the Nevilles, who keep a private house and a coal yard, are above the lot."

"This is too ridiculous," Purcell said incredulously.

"But it's quite true. The Nevilles are in their own minds like Grandees of Spain, their airs of superiority are laughable; you would say so if you saw Mrs. Neville bowing like a duchess when she condescended to notice the existence of a neighbour whose degree in the social scale was an inch lower than her own."

"How absurd."

"It is," said Fitzmaurice, "but they don't see it in that light; they have lived all their lives in one narrow little circle out of which they have never ventured. If they had they would soon find their proper level; you know it's very easy to become a great personage in a small place."

"A great part of the Nevilles' grandeur is derived from the fact that they have a handsome side-car on which they drive in state—on Sundays, to the great envy and mortification of their neighbours."

"All this is very wonderful to me," remarked Purcell.

"I'll tell you what is funnier still," said the smart Miss Lawlor. "Perhaps you have seen the Blakes. Well they are first cousins to the Burkes, but the former were much too aristocratic for the latter, and never knew or even recognised each other in the street, and it was only when they met at the wedding of a mutual cousin a couple of months ago that the Misses Blake were introduced by a stranger to the Misses Burke."

"It sounds like an incident in a farce."

"Yes but I assure you it is a fact. You can have no idea of the fine distinctions these people draw amongst themselves, they are all more or less ashamed of their shops, and they scorn the trade they are obliged to tolerate."

"Surely we live in a strange world," said Purcell.

"We at least live in a strange corner of it. All these people are now educating their sons well, in order that they may pass examinations for the army or the navy, or take out medical diplomas, or even get into a bank where, though placed on a high stool and a low salary for the remainder of their days, they secure for themselves an air of gentility which overshadows their consequent starvation, and renders their position a desirable martyrdom. Anything is better than trade, they think."

All the time the two Miss Lawlors were banging away heartily at the piano, crashing the bass notes, jerking out the treble chords, and filling the air with a fury of sound.

When they paused breathless from exertion, they received the united thanks of those who had not listened to them, with many bashful smiles and broken sentences of protestation against a praise they evidently enjoyed.

So the hours wore away till supper was announced, and after that pleasant meal, when cold chicken and tongue and pastry made by Aunt Allie, and sparkling sherry had been duly consumed and drunk, the guests rose to depart, it being eleven o'clock, an hour considered reprehensibly late in Grantsborough.

When Madge Rochford was ready to depart, Purcell went to where she stood and said :

"May I see you home?"

"Thank you Mr. Fitzmaurice has kindly offered to walk with me to the rectory," she answered.

Purcell felt pained and turned away.

"She is in love with him," he said to himself; "they have known each other for years, they could not help being lovers."

Fitzmaurice was not only saying good-night, but good-bye to his friends. Madge stood just within the drawing-room door, partly leaning against the wall, silent and perhaps a little paler than usual, watching him, and thinking how soon he must say the same words to her.

The Misses Lawlor had made their adieux rather noisily, declaring in loud voices he would soon forget them; Aunt Maria and Aunt Allie took his hand one after the other in theirs, pressing it silently and affectionately.

"I shall not say good-bye," said Purcell, "I shall see you in the morning."

Dr. Fowler jerked out advice to take care of himself, and then Fitzmaurice left the house with their mingled farewells ringing in his ears and walked silently down the hill with Madge by his side.

The sky was clear, blue and crowded with stars, the night calm and silent save for the ripple of the stream and the rustle of the trees in the deserted square, and the air fragrant with hay and hawthorn.

"You will not forget me whilst I am away,"

he said, in answer to some words Madge had spoken.

Forget him. If he only knew how often she would think of him through the coming lonely days.

"I shall not," she said, casting down her eyes, which she feared might tell him too much.

"That is good of you," said Fitzmaurice, in a tone that grew almost pathetic, not altogether from any feelings he had regarding his saying farewell, but in part out of sympathy with the hour and the night, with its tender light and its solemn stars, and with the scene generally, which impressed the sensitive side of his nature.

"I shall be glad to know," he continued, looking not at her face, but up into the space above, "there is some one here who will think of me sometimes when I am working my way in the world. All I said the other evening about people forgetting quickly, was nonsense; I know well enough there are some who always remember their absent friends."

He had meant what he had said in the rectory garden, concerning time obliterating recollections from the mind, as waves erase names written on sands, but he was in a different mood now, and spoke under the strong impulse of his present feelings.

"I shall think of you—always," said the girl with so much feeling that he was touched for the moment, and turned to look at her; their eyes met and in that faint light he could see hers melt into liquid softness more expressive than words.

He felt grateful and said hurriedly:

"You think better of me than I deserve; will you let me write to you sometimes and let you know how I am going on—Madge?"

He had not called her by her Christian name since she returned from school, when a mutual

feeling had dawned on them that their old relationship had undergone some change.

"Yes," she replied, wondering if it were wrong to grant this request without first asking her parents' permission.

"And you will write to me in return occasionally a letter as long as a summer's day and as bright."

"I will," she answered, striving to keep her voice steady but he caught the little quiver in her tone, as he had done on another occasion and felt moved, and even at that moment pitied her for liking one who had not an equal affection to offer in return.

"Here we are at the rectory gate," he said pushing it open and standing within the shadow which a lime-tree cast over the spot.

"Our walk has been short," she said; it was the last walk she might have with him for months—ay perhaps for years.

"Let us say good-bye," he said in a low voice not without feeling.

"Good-bye," she answered raising her head to look into his face.

He took her hand, that trembled in his, and held it a second; her heart gave a sudden throb, and two great tears hung on her long dark lashes. At that instant, obeying a sudden impulse he bent his head to kiss her, but some new thought coming to him, he merely pressed her hand in silence and let it drop.

Without another word she went hastily up the pathway leading to the house; when she got to the hall door she looked round her once and waved her handkerchief, he was yet at the gate and raised his hat in response.

In another second she turned the handle of the door and entered the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

FARE THEE WELL.

FITZMAURICE was to leave Grantsborough at ten o'clock next morning by the mail car.

He was up betimes, a sense of restlessness had seized him, and he became impatient to have the hour of his parting over. His luggage had been packed in a stout carpet-bag the Corporal had discovered in some unused region of the cottage—a rather antiquated and threadbare specimen of its class, having but one handle and a broken lock.

"I'll leave my rifle behind, Casey," he said. "I suppose it will be of no use to me at the other side of the channel."

"I'll keep it clean," replied the Corporal, speaking in a husky tone, "till you come back t' see us all agin, Masther Maurice. 'Twill be like company to meself an' the ould masther when we'll look at it there in the corner an' think o' you."

"Thinking of me, won't do you any good," Fitzmaurice replied feeling grateful to the old man for his affection.

"I don't know that; it's often I'll think o' you an' talk o' you t' meself and t' the ould masther. But sure it's the lonely house 'twill be now entirely, entirely. I dunna what we'll do 'tall at 'tall without you," said the old soldier, who had lost his usual animation this morning and looked quite dejected.

"Better invite some of the cronies, you meet once a month, up here and have a chat with you now and then."

"Is it me Masther Maurice; devil a bit o' me, the low mane lot. Sure, they'd come fast enough t' pry about the house, an' pick out o' me, an' see how we live, that they might go down t' the square an' talk it all over agin', bad cess to them all this day."

"There's a friend of mine, Mr. Purcell, whom I shall ask to call on my father occasionally, as long as he remains here."

"Ah, 'twill help to cheer him maybe," said the Corporal, busying himself about the breakfast, and hurrying from the kitchen to the sitting-room whilst he conversed.

"I have no doubt it will."

"But Masther Maurice you'll not forget to write to the ould masther often."

"I shan't indeed."

"Because it's he'll be glad to hear from you, though he'd say nothin' all the time. It's his nature to be cowl'd, an' distant, an' silent, an' not to show in the least how he feels, but sure I knew him afore you were born, an' I know his ways, an' it's himself that's fond o' you, take me word for it, Masther Maurice."

Fitzmaurice looked out of the window and made no reply. He was thinking he should never look on this place familiar to him since boyhood, in the same light as he did now. By-and-by when he returned all things would seem changed to him, though all things remained the same; he felt, not without some touch of sorrow, he was wrenching himself now and for ever, from his past life and its associations; that, come what might in the future he could never resume this existence he was about to leave; that the day had arrived when he was to begin a new chapter of his career with which the pages of the past would have but slight connection.

Presently his father entered the room his feet in slippers, a winged coat thrown round his stooped shoulders.

"Any letters?" he asked. Then his eye caught sight of a blue envelope bearing his name.

"Not wan sir, but from Hennessy," answered the Corporal. "He has his name in raised letters on the back o' the envelope now, I thank you. I suppose it's his bill, bad luck to him, for the few bottles o' port we got last month."

The old man tore the envelope open, and casting a glance at its contents, flung both carelessly on the ground.

"He will have to wait until next month," he remarked. "Maurice," he continued, turning to his son, "I am giving you twelve sovereigns in this," holding out an old leather pocket-book black with time. "It's not much, I know——"

"It's a great deal. I fear you cannot spare so much," replied the young man.

"We can manage I suppose. I may send you more in a little time, if you get no employment. Buy yourself some clothes before you call on the men to whom I have given you letters of introduction."

"Yes I thought of doing that."

After a pause the old man said with a curious smile curling his upper lip,

"There was an idea in the world when I was young that no gentleman should earn a penny by any means or profession save the Army or the Navy. That has died away to a great degree, except perhaps in this country; it certainly has in England, where money is considered of far more importance than lineage."

"We are getting more sense now-a-days," said Maurice, "and I think the same opinion holds good in Ireland as in the sister country."

"You will have to earn your own bread somehow; that is no dishonour, it is an accident."

"Perhaps. I shouldn't wonder if I enlisted. Many young men of good families do, now competitive examinations for the army have been made so stiff that only hollow-chested students can succeed."

"An' it's them'll make the fine officers, be me word," said the Corporal scornfully; "it's much hardship they'll be able to bear on active service, an it's many o' them, maybe, that never crossed a horse or handled a gun."

"We live in strange times," said the old man; "to me it seems as if the world had turned upside down."

"So it has; but, take it for all in all, it's, I think, an upset for the better."

"However," said Ulic Fitzmaurice, "no matter in what occupation you are employed, always remember you are a gentleman."

The old man spoke in a clear voice, laying his hand on the back of his chair and involuntarily drawing himself up to his full height.

"I shall," his son answered firmly.

Then they sat down to breakfast, during which few words were spoken. The meal over, Maurice rose to say good-bye, and the Corporal with intuitive delicacy, took up the carpet bag and went out of the house.

When Fitzmaurice rejoined him, they were silent for some time. They walked side by side along the road leading to Grantsborough, Maurice with his hat pushed over his eyes, his hands thrust into the pockets of his coat; Casey in his sleeved-waistcoat carrying the carpet-bag, and moving with that measured pace and uncivilian air a military man never loses.

"Masther Maurice," he said, when they had proceeded some distance.

"Yes?"

"It's not yesterday I knew you."

This abrupt statement startled Maurice from thoughts filling his mind just then, and made him look sharply at the old soldier, who turned away his head as if interested in the scenery.

"That's true," said Fitzmaurice gravely, wondering to what the Corporal's remark was *à propos*.

"I came to live with the ould masther when you was a little fellow that I used to take on me knee, an' carry you in me arms, an' I lived with your uncle, the colonel, afore then, an' a brave soldier an' a fine man he was; an' they always treated me as if I wasn't a servant at all," said Casey, with his eyes yet averted.

"They valued you as a friend."

"Well Masther Maurice, I want you to do the same by me, I do."

"You know perfectly well I look on you as my best friend."

"You have spoken the word, Masther Maurice—an' as a best friend I want you to treat me still, if I'm not making too bowld."

"Not in the least," replied Maurice wondering what all this overture meant.

"Sure?"

"Quite certain Casey."

"Well then Masther Maurice," he continued nervously, "I have put a trifle by out o' me pension, that I have no use for 'tall at 'tall; and I want you just—just to take care of it for me 'till you come back—it's only eight pounds."

Maurice grasped the old man's hand and wrung it; he was deeply touched by this last act of faithfulness, "you are a good fellow, and I

shall never forget your offer, but I can't do what you ask."

"Masther Maurice if you don't, I'll never have an aisy day. Let me feel I did something for you; if you refuse you'll stab me t' the heart."

He stood in the roadway facing his young master, the carpet bag at his feet, his right hand holding out the purse, a look of entreaty in his honest eyes; Maurice fearing to wound him by resistance took the purse.

"You have a heart of gold," he said; and the old man thought of these words with comfort through the years to come.

"You'll take care of Brandy and Snap, I know," Maurice said presently.

"An' its they'll miss you as well as meself."

"Take them out for a run sometimes."

"Poor craythurs how they'll cry, and how they'll watch for your coming back, I'll not know what to say to pacify them. But its we'll all be miserable. Masther Maurice," he added striving to be more cheerful, "hurry and marry a rich lady an' come back an' settle in the ould place; sure there's no counthry like ould Ireland."

When they arrived at the hotel from where the mail-car departed, Purcell was already there.

"I intend to drive to the station and see you off, Fitzmaurice," he said, "and I shall walk back, I want exercise."

"You are extremely kind," said Maurice glad to receive this proof of friendliness.

"We shall have to wait five minutes or more; let us have some brandy before we start, and the Corporal must have a drink also for the sake of auld lang syne."

Casey, standing behind his young master watching his every movement like a faithful dog, produced a

smile on his melancholy countenance, then standing to order gave Purcell a military salute.

"Thank you kindly sir," he said.

The three figures disappeared within the hotel door, a fact the youngest of the five Miss Lawlors, on guard at the chemist's window, communicated to her sisters yet lingering over their breakfast in various stages of demi-toilet.

When Purcell and Fitzmaurice followed by Casey reappeared once more, the mail-car was at the door, the usual crowd of idlers, beggars, and the solitary figure of a policeman in attendance as usual.

"Ah, thin may God bless you this day anyhow," said Biddy the Blarney catching sight of Fitzmaurice.

"God be wid you Masther Maurice," said Ted the Gom pulling his misshaped hat by way of salute.

"Sure it's the last o' the ould stock is lavin' us; may the holy mother be wid him, an' maybe he'd give poor Biddy the last penny afore he goes."

"Long life t' yer honour, an' may you soon be here agin wid us, an' take yer own back from the sthrangers," said another beggar.

"Plaze God he will; sure it's the upstarts is in the ould house where we all got bite an' sup as much as we liked, an' our fathers afore us, but them is in it now sure no one knows where they come from."

"Musha little we thought we'd see the last o' the ould name goin' away from us to foreign parts," said Biddy raising her hands dramatically.

"Why thin I'm ashamed at yer edecation, sure England is not foreign parts," said Ted, the scorn of superiority sounding in his rich brogue.

"Sure it is foreign enough an' a dark Prodesdant counthry, an' a mighty wicked place they say God help them is in it, I pray this day," replied Biddy.

"Begor, sure it's yoursel' knows all about it, wan I'd think you thravelled there," responded Ted, with a mixture of derision and humour.

"G' lang out o' that an' hould yer whist," said the driver, making a cut of his whip at Ted which he dexterously avoided. "Now, gentlemen, if yer ready, so is the baste," he added.

"Musha, may the saints above purtect you, an' send you a fine lady wid plenty o' money," shouted Biddy from the crowd.

Purcell sprang on the car, Maurice turned round and shook hands again with Casey, who strove to maintain his countenance and keep down the mist gathering in his eyes.

"Good-bye Casey, and take care of my father," he said, knowing he could add nothing which would better please the Corporal.

"That I will, sir," he answered, with a tone of pride in his wavering voice.

Maurice jumped up on the car.

"Hould on you brute," the driver said to the horse.

"All right," said one of the stablemen, "give him the whip."

"Look," said Purcell as the car drove away, "there are the five Miss Lawlors waving you good-bye."

CHAPTER IX.

IN MERRIE LONDON TOWN.

FITZMAURICE arrived on a fine morning in June at Euston Station, from whence he drove to Bloomsbury, according to directions received from Purcell, who gave him the address of a lodging in Gower Street.

The day promised to be bright, the air was clear

and exhilarating, and, sensitive to influences, he felt his spirits rise and his hopes strengthen.

Having breakfasted, he went into the streets, to familiarise himself with the great city he had longed to see. London—the central point round which science, commerce, and arts flourish—with its teeming millions, visible signs of wealth, vastness stretching north, south, east, and west, magnificent thoroughfares, endless labyrinths of streets, public buildings, historic sights, great importance politically and financially, increasing prosperity, filled him with wonder, dazzled and bewildered him.

He felt at once depressed—as one lost in a crowd—and yet proud of being merely a unit in the population of a city the acknowledged beacon light of Europe.

In his wanderings about the squares, streets, and avenues, he had more than once passed Sir Lawrence Usher's house, situated on the south side of St. James's Square, and had lingered to gaze at it with feelings of interest and curiosity, for there he had determined to bring his first introduction, and within those walls he might begin the battle of his new life.

Sir Lawrence Usher was a member of Parliament and a man of considerable influence. He had once been a Cabinet Minister in a Whig Government. The defeat of his party, after some years of stormy reign, relieved him of the responsibilities of office which he subsequently refused to resume. For him the pleasures of social life had greater attractions than the worries of political strife; he became a spectator of rather than an actor in affairs of State.

Foster's Baronetage and Knightage, a book Sir Lawrence detested for its truthfulness, declared him in his seventy-first year, announced him a widower for thirty years. Ulic Fitzmaurice had known him

when both were young; not only were they neighbours, but close friends, as their fathers had been before them, when the hospitality of Mount Maurice rivalled the entertainments at Usher Park House previous to the Union.

Sir Lawrence had been the boon companion of Ulic Fitzmaurice, had shared the dissipation of his continental life, as well as the wild course of his London career in the days when William IV. was king. The baronet, however, had married, settled down to a political career, and taken office. Ulic Fitzmaurice had likewise married, but not altered his course of life, and by gambling he helped to complete the ruin of his house.

Aware of these facts, it was not without curiosity that, at the end of his first week in London, Maurice called on the baronet.

The great door was opened by a servant in chocolate livery, whose countenance wore the solemn imperturbability of a sphinx.

"Sir Lawrence Usher?" said Fitzmaurice, presenting his card.

Maurice was by a single gesture bidden to enter, and the man of calves departed. Re-appearing in a few minutes he intimated Sir Lawrence was at home and would be seen. In another moment Maurice found himself in the presence of the ex-cabinet minister.

Maurice looked and beheld a man whose thin shrunken figure, and pale wrinkled face bore traces of the three score and ten years through which he had lived.

In expression his features were mild, and wore a look Sir Lawrence intended should be considered arch; his eyes were intelligent and bright, his teeth suspiciously white and even, and his bright auburn wig, which from its juvenile air was out of

harmony with his face, gave him an appearance unnatural and occasionally comical. There was, indeed, in his appearance a strange look of age and youth, as if art had striven to repair the ravages of years, and had succeeded in leaving behind an impression at once grotesque and pitiful.

Though it was past mid-day he was seated at breakfast toying with some dry toast; a cup of black coffee, a bottle of claret, a bunch of grapes and a box of scented cigarettes were on the table before him.

"You have seen my advertisement," he said, when Maurice entered the room; "pray sit down," he added pointing to a chair with a hand ornamented with handsome rings. "You can talk whilst I am at breakfast," he went on, helping himself as he spoke to a single grape.

"I think there must be some mistake, sir," said Maurice quietly, "I have not seen the advertisement to which you refer."

"Ah?" said Sir Lawrence, elevating his eyebrows.

"I have called to deliver a letter of introduction to you from my father Ulic Fitzmaurice of Grantsborough."

"Bless my soul," said Sir Lawrence, fumbling for his gold-rimmed eye-glass, through which he looked at his visitor sharply for a moment. "Pray excuse me," he continued rising and bowing with grace whilst he held out his hand. "It is a mistake of Flanders; he mentioned no name, and I really didn't look at your card—I hope you will pardon me—and how is your father?"

"He is well, thank you"

"Ah! he was my dear friend once—a good many years ago, more than I care to remember perhaps; before I entered into political life," he said gesticu-

lating gracefully. "Your father cared little for politics, did not care at all, I may say; I couldn't persuade him to join me. I found them absorbing for a time, and so we lost sight of each other," he added a wan smile playing over his face.

"But he has not forgotten you sir," Maurice said; "he has spoken of you continually to me."

This was not true, but the lad believed it would gratify his hearer.

"Has he indeed," said the baronet evidently pleased, "he remembers me still; ay, many a pleasant day and night we spent together," he added shaking his head as if regretting the time had passed for the revival of such pleasures.

"Perhaps the ties formed in early life outlive those contracted in age," said Maurice feeling his way cautiously.

"True," said the baronet briefly, and once more he fixed his bright eyes on his visitor's face with a searching look; this time there was something of interest in his glance.

"You are aware, I suppose sir," said the young man, changing his tone and becoming more serious, "my father has entirely lost his property, and retains only a life interest which merely supports him."

"Yes indeed, I am well aware of it; the world's changes are sometimes strange and sad, very sad—may I give you some claret. No?"

Maurice felt thrown off his track by this last remark, but hastened to regain it quickly.

"I am his only child," he said looking at Sir Lawrence, who lowered his eyes to brush cigarette ashes from his knee. "He has not been able to give me a profession, and I saw there was nothing for me but to make my way in life."

"An excellent resolution," replied Sir Lawrence blandly.

"I should have acted on it earlier," continued Maurice feeling encouraged, "but I have now come to London for this purpose; before I came away I asked my father for a letter of introduction to you sir, as I thought," he continued, slowly and speaking with emphasis, "for his sake you might feel inclined to use your influence on my behalf."

Sir Lawrence made no immediate reply; his eyes were fixed on the ring Louis Philippe had presented him, bearing the miniature portrait of the fair and unhappy Louise de Penthievre. After a few seconds, he looked up and said:

"I shall gladly use any interest I have in assisting your design, but in these days of competitive examinations, when government appointments are open to all, I fear I can be of little service."

Maurice looked at him keenly; was he to take this polite speech as a dismissal of the hopes he had long encouraged: at the thought his heart sank. Without replying he handed his father's letter of introduction to the baronet. Sir Lawrence opened it slowly, fumbled again for his eye-glass, and read the few sentences addressed to him.

"Poor Fitzmaurice," he said musingly, "he was always a fine fellow—dear me."

When he had refolded the letter he added:

"I hope you can dine with me this evening, we shall be quite alone, and then we can talk at greater length about yourself."

He rose and Maurice followed his example.

"You are very kind."

"You are not already engaged, I hope?"

"Thank you I am not."

"Then till seven *au revoir*," said Sir Lawrence extending his hand and making a bow that would have been considered distinguished in the court of Louis Quatorze.

CHAPTER X.

DINING WITH SIR LAWRENCE.

MAURICE left St. James's Square in a state of mental excitement. Though undecided if he had to congratulate himself on having secured the baronet's interest, yet Sir Lawrence's well-bred manner and graceful courtesy led him to think he had gained his good-will.

Sir Lawrence in appearance and bearing was different from what he had expected to find; and now he knew him, Maurice felt he might in some way prepare to adapt himself to his requirements. He felt certain if he could only gain the baronet's interest, his position would be secured; he believed where there is a will there is a way, and that, no matter how far competitive examinations contrived to exclude influence, the baronet had it yet in his power to serve him.

If he could only make one secure step the remainder of his progress would be comparatively easy. At present it seemed as though through ignorance of the world he had flung himself unprepared into this vast city, into this seething sea of human life, where each man struggled for self alone; that it was little less than madness for him, unknown, friendless, and unaided to hope for success where so many with fairer chances and greater merits sunk beneath the waters of adverse circumstances and were heard of no more.

Every morning he saw troops of men rushing

towards the city, where by continued labour they barely earned the necessities of life, for themselves and those depending on them; men of education, talent, and ability, slaved all day as ushers, tutors or journalists to gain a maintenance that never rose to luxury or independence; hundreds from overcrowded professions and the universities emigrated yearly and became hewers of wood and drawers of water beyond the reach of civilization; and some sent mad by failure, distress and hunger, sought escape in death.

Such considerations were depressing; his confidence in himself had hitherto closed his mind to the perils and difficulties he had undertaken. Who was he that he should look forward to success where many others had failed. The strong sense of hope mercifully rising in young hearts, which but a long series of misfortunes can extinguish, had buoyed him, made him look forward without fear and with confidence towards the future.

He reached St. James's Square a little before seven o'clock and was shown into Sir Lawrence's private study, where the baronet was in the habit of transacting such business as fell to his lot. He was absent from the room when Maurice entered, but came in presently in evening dress, his wig and face looking more at variance than ever, his shirt glittering like marble, his thin hands adorned with rings, and his small feet encased in patent leather shoes and pink silk stockings.

Maurice, who had not a dress suit, felt, in mentally comparing his attire with Sir Lawrence's, as if guilty of some breach of social etiquette. The baronet was more courteous than he had been in the morning, and evidently in better humour.

"You are punctual," he said to his guest, "and I like punctuality, especially in young men. In my

early days some considered it gave them an air of distinction to arrive after the second or third course had been served. I remember the first time I met Disraeli—who was rather affected on returning from the East, and fond of causing sensation—was at a dinner given by Lady Blessington. He was not present when we sat down, but quietly slipped into a chair reserved for him, just as an *entrecôte à la Bordelaise* had been served."

"He did not disturb the party?"

"Certainly not. He liked being late, because it relieved him from the preliminary conversation, which is always a bore; and he was then able to keep his best epigrammatical sentences for the dinner-table. This was clever, but I have always noticed men who are clever in the details of life, are not wanting in wisdom when dealing with great events," said Sir Lawrence fingering the narrow ribbon which suspended his eye-glass, and smiling pleasantly on his guest.

"I suppose," said Maurice, "Disraeli's want of punctuality was pardoned in him as a distinguished man?"

"Exactly so. It was even regarded as a pleasing eccentricity; and people like men of genius to have eccentricities that afford to be amusingly criticised. You are a young man," added Sir Lawrence, with a smile that almost merged into a smirk, "but if you live to be much older, you will learn you have come into a strange world."

"I don't think it requires age to discern that sir," replied Maurice with a semi-humorous look in his blue-grey eyes.

"'Pon my word, I believe you are right," said the baronet, elevating his eyebrows. "But then in all ages men have thought the world was not as it should have been. Mr. Pope the poet said to Sir Godfrey Kneller—one of the vainest men that ever

lived—he was sure if he (Sir Godfrey) had had the construction of the earth, it would be a far more comfortable place in which to reside. ‘Fore God,’ said the painter, looking at the deformed poet, ‘if I had had the construction of some small things in the world, I would have made them straighter’——and there goes the gong, let us to dinner.”

A servant entering the room, and drawing aside heavy Turkish curtains, threw open the folding doors concealed behind them, communicating with a small dining-room. For a moment Maurice felt bewildered at the *ensemble* suddenly revealed.

The walls of the apartment were oak-panelled, each panel containing an oval portrait of a beauty of Charles II.’s court, set in a richly gilt frame. Curtains of green velvet were drawn across the windows and doors; old silver sconces were fixed at either side of the high curiously carved chimney-piece. The dinner-table was laid for two, and with its epergne of crystal and silver, filled with Gloire de Dijon roses, its clusters of wax lights with tiny pink shades, its mellow fruits, its little groups of coloured wine-glasses, and sparkle of silver and gold was a picture in itself.

The baronet devoted his attention to dinner, and said little until it was over, but the few remarks Fitzmaurice ventured to make now and then, his host listened to with attention, and even signified his interest by nodding his head or smiling blandly.

Maurice began to feel at ease sitting *vis-à-vis* with an ex-cabinet minister, a man having the reputation of being one of the most brilliant conversationalists in society. He felt sure he had acted wisely in calling on Sir Lawrence, and entertained fresh confidence in his own good luck.

“I like to eat what the gods, or rather my cook provides me, in silent appreciation,” Sir Law-

rence remarked when the servants had withdrawn. "I hold no man can enjoy his dinner if his mind is engaged in framing an epigrammatical sentence, or his tongue in turning a compliment; whilst we dine we should listen to music—to the music of sweet voices, though they but babbled delicious nonsense. I hold dining as a high art, and my cook knows I am worthy of him."

"And he of you," said Maurice.

"Exactly," said Sir Lawrence, "I understand him, and few men of genius are understood whilst living. My chef is a great man, his inventions—he calls them inspirations—are marvellous, he is a worthy disciple of Urbain Dubois, but alas, like all great men, he has weaknesses, though in him they are mercifully limited to two."

"May I be permitted to ask what they are?"

"Certainly; he is in love with Adelina Patti, and has his box at the opera every night she sings; his second weakness is a desire to get knighted. His Royal Highness has promised me to gratify the fellow's ambition some day; meanwhile Monsieur Gravie lives for the hour that shall see his name enrolled amongst that of city knights. Try one of these cigarettes, they come from Constantinople."

Sir Lawrence leant back in his chair, elevated his eyebrows and continued:

"Now we will talk about yourself."

This sentence brought Fitzmaurice back to the commonplace realities of life from the regions to which his conversation had wafted him.

"Self is a subject on which all men, according to Lord Byron, grow eloquent," replied Maurice; "but I'm afraid I shall prove an exception to the general rule."

"I hope not," said the baronet; "a man who

doesn't speak of himself thinks the more of that interesting subject, and having no one to contradict his thoughts, becomes self-sufficient."

"Which I hope I am not," said Fitzmaurice.

"I trust not, for to rest satisfied with yourself is the surest way in life of giving dissatisfaction to others; avoid it as you value popularity. Now my young friend, what do you intend doing in London?"

Emboldened by the sherry and champagne he had drunk, Maurice replied with decision:

"I mean to succeed."

Sir Lawrence smiled, and probably would have laughed outright, had he not been warned by his valet of the disastrous consequences such an act might entail to his facial appearance.

"It's a capital answer," he said "but I am afraid success, which of course means fortune, seldom meets one with open arms, though it may seem so oftentimes to those who know nothing of the trouble taken to secure her. It is only when great pains have been endured to lure the jade that, like any coquette, she is won, but once she shows signs of capitulation, victory is in the hands of her conqueror."

"I am determined to take pains and shall not rest satisfied until Fortune rewards me."

"If so there is hope for you."

"I trust there is," replied Maurice earnestly, looking at Sir Lawrence whom he knew could help him, then waited with some agitation for his next words.

The baronet paused, took the cigarette from his mouth, and began slowly.

"When you called on me this morning, I referred to an advertisement I had inserted in the *Times* for a secretary."

Maurice could hardly restrain himself from starting; he felt his countenance flush, and watched Sir Lawrence as if he would read his thoughts.

"I believe in advertisements," the baronet went on, rather than in making applications to friends; in a case like this, I could only oblige one by accepting the *protégé* recommended, and I should be certain to offend many."

He paused but Maurice made no reply.

"I devoted three mornings to receiving applicants for the secretaryship; they numbered two hundred and forty. I was determined not to decide until to-day, the third morning, when by some accident you called on me. I was not quite sure I liked you at first, and I therefore hit upon the idea of asking you to dine with me that I might see something more of you, as it is my opinion a man is at his best or his worst at the dinner-table, and now I have come to the conclusion I like you well enough to make you my secretary."

Maurice listened to him with bated breath, and at his last words a sense of relief beyond expression came to him; he had suddenly turned from the dark and uncertain pathway lying before him, and placed on a firm footing, equipped for the battle of life; he might now look forward to the future with the morning sunlight on his face.

"How can I thank you?" he said earnestly. "This is more than I had hoped for in my most sanguine moments."

"The salary I give," continued Sir Lawrence, "is a hundred a year; you will live with me, and I think you will not find your duties heavy. I principally select my secretaries, not so much for the abilities they possess, but because I like them, and expect them to act as companions when required."

"Then I consider myself fortunate indeed."

"You have a good appearance, and some tact," said Sir Lawrence. "These two gifts if not born with a man can never be acquired, and to a young man beginning life are invaluable—they are always a guarantee of success—the first will gain you friends, the latter will keep them; indeed with tact there is nothing which you cannot accomplish."

Maurice listened with delighted attention; to all men and women there is nothing so interesting as conversation concerning themselves; to the young, with hopes, plans, and sweet uncertainties before them, it is especially fascinating.

His first thoughts rushed to Madge who would feel as glad as he did at this unexpected piece of good luck; she had always believed in his future, and now an event had happened that proved her faith not misplaced. In this moment of triumph he thought of her, and felt in his heart a throb of gratitude for her faith—for her sympathy when his prospects were blank, and he had departed for a strange city in quest of fortune. How glad his father and the Corporal would be also, and how the people in Grantsborough would wonder. He would certainly rise in their opinion; for, though they already held his name in esteem for the sake of family traditions, yet to be connected with a man whom in their eyes was but a little way removed from royalty was an honour they would duly appreciate.

"You will lunch and dine with me when I am at home," said Sir Lawrence, "but we shall not breakfast together. During that meal you will read me the leading articles in the *Times* and *Telegraph*, and have previously acquainted yourself with events of the day, that you may be ready to communicate them, and spare me the trouble of reading. You will answer my letters, play chess or bezique with

me occasionally, or read me a chapter of a novel—I rather like fiction, and am fond of hearing a musical voice. So your duties will be light and I hope,” ended Sir Lawrence, with a bow “not unpleasant nor uninstrusive.”

“You are very good,” said Maurice, gratefully. “Believe me, I am sensible of your kindness, and will do all in my power to merit your favour.”

“If you try to be of service, you are certain to succeed. I am satisfied that where your will leads, you will conquer; you need not feel flattered, it is a rule which stands good for most men,” Sir Lawrence said, raising a glass of champagne to his lips and imbibing it slowly like one who had learned to prolong the pleasure of its flavour.

“My last secretary succeeded very well,” he continued. “Like you, he was the son of an old friend, and I saw after awhile that he had a career before him, though unaware in which direction it lay. One day by accident I found a copy of verses he had written, very fair verses, too—by the way do you write poetry?”

“Not now; I did when I was young,” answered Maurice hesitatingly, feeling as if he had been discovered in some foolish act.

“I am not,” said Sir Lawrence smiling, as he noted his embarrassment, “of the same opinion as the second King of Prussia, who ordered his son—afterwards Frederick the Great—to be scourged almost to death when he was a boy for having been guilty of writing a few verses. I rather believe in Horace Walpole’s view, who said poetry was as contagious as small-pox, that everyone catches it at least once in a lifetime, and the sooner the better, for an old rhymster made as ridiculous a figure as Socrates dancing at fourscore. However, I gave my young friend the advice which Lord Tenny-

son offered a poetic aspirant, that 'he might write verses in his leisure time, if he could find nothing else to do.' But he left me soon after, and went on the stage."

"To become an actor?" asked Maurice, with astonishment, his mind immediately conjuring up visions of players he had seen in Ireland; individuals with greasy locks and heelless boots, who walked through a common-place world with a tragic air, were given to the consumption of stout and to the wearing of Ulster coats—mercifully supposed to conceal a multitude of wardrobe shortcomings.

"Yes," said Sir Lawrence, "to become an actor. Take care you don't get fascinated by the footlights and all that lies beyond them. It is the fashion for young gentlemen to get stage-struck now-a-days. Why not? Charles X. learned to dance on the tight-rope."

So saying he dropped his cigarette into a little silver ash-tray, supported by bronze figures of Auxesia and Damia.

Maurice rose to depart.

"You can begin your new duties the day after to-morrow," said Sir Lawrence. "Let me see, that will be Wednesday. Ah, Wednesday is a lucky day. I believe in luck and all that sort of thing; and I had my horoscope once cast."

"If it was true it must have foretold some bright events in your life."

"It certainly told me of one strange event which has yet to be fulfilled," said Sir Lawrence. "Good night."

CHAPTER XI.

SMOTE THE CHORD OF SELF.

WHEN the door had closed on him, Maurice felt an unwonted sense of exhilaration take possession of him. He was elated by this unlooked for good fortune which had fallen to his lot; full of high spirits begotten of satisfaction in the present and hope for the future.

But this morning vague thoughts of fear, care, and the uncertainty of his position had depressed him; now they had passed. From being homeless and friendless he had by one lucky step secured a position for the present, which might lead to better things in the future.

He would study Sir Lawrence, make himself indispensable to him; the baronet had interest and influence at his command, and with such a valuable friend what position might not he hope for in the coming time. His birthright had been squandered, the lands belonging to his family had passed into the hands of traders, but he might yet achieve wealth and fame.

He laughed bitterly, remembering the subterfuges to which his father and himself were obliged to submit occasionally to obtain the common necessities of existence. How pitiful his life in the past, how shabby in its details, and yet he had borne it for years without feeling its degradation; but now removed from it even for so short a time, the sense of its petty indignities came back to him.

"We could have fallen no lower," he said, "the reaction must begin now; the darkest hour is that before dawn; I shall herald a new state of things."

Henceforth instead of youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm of the boat in which he must steer his way down the troubled waters of life, self-interest must sit in the former position and self-confidence in the latter. To conquer he must study those with whom the chances of his success lay; and this study he determined should rise to the rank of an art.

He would live for self alone; self should become the mainspring of his existence, the key to every action of his life, the pivot on which his every movement must turn. All circumstances coming within his reach, all persons with whom he came in contact, were to be judged and treated according to the services they were capable of rendering him either in the present or the future.

Such thoughts and resolutions passed through his mind as he walked rapidly through Oxford Street. Its crowds and brilliantly lighted shops had no attraction for him; he was too full of himself and his good fortune to vary his course or pause until he reached his lodgings.

Admitting himself with a latch-key and ascending the dimly-lighted stairs, he reached his bedroom. On closing the door it seemed to him he had shut out the world, and was now in a universe filled by his own imaginings and schemes of which he was the central figure.

The small square low-ceilinged apartment appeared terribly dingy and sadly threadbare after the splendour of Sir Lawrence's mansion. The centre table at which he presently seated himself to write, was scantily covered by a red woollen cloth, the pattern of which had years ago vanished,

to be replaced by multitudinous stains of ink and splotches of candle grease. The walls were covered with a cheap bright paper whose pattern of countless diamonds in pink and white fascinated and dazzled the eye until the brain grew dizzy; the carpet which had seen better days, had become wounded in the fray with time and the boots of many lodgers, for here and there on its surface were strips of glazed matting, in general appearance like pieces of sticking plaster.

One of the two chairs covered with faded chintz, was like the world, sadly deceptive, and gave way under those who trusted to its support rather than their own strength; a chest of drawers did duty for a dressing-table, as might be inferred from the fact that it supported a looking-glass adorned with a piece of pendulous ex-white lace, like a cap on the head of a maid-of-all-work.

Fitzmaurice looking round smiled somewhat bitterly.

"How many men and women, I wonder, have these walls sheltered," he thought, "and what different stories must each life have had. Shut from the world in this miserable little room, what must their thoughts have been. Had they irrecoverable pasts, or hopes or ambitions like mine, or sorrows that lay with them through silent nights; and did they leave this room for happy homes, or self-sought graves.

"Ah, the world is a strange puzzle, and there is no use in thinking how others have shaped themselves to its ways; one's own life is enough to fill one's own mind night and day."

He always came back to thoughts of self.

"To-morrow," he concluded, "I make my farewell bow to poverty, and I am resolved that we shall never know each other again—never again."

He sat down and began a letter to his father, in which he confined himself to the statement of his interview with Sir Lawrence, his dining at St. James's Square, finally mentioning the unexpected offer which had been made him. When he wrote to Madge Rochford it was in a different strain.

To her he spoke of himself unrestrainedly, of his chances of success, his hopes, the impression made on him by Sir Lawrence. He told her what the baronet said regarding his selection of secretaries, dwelt on the advantages which daily intercourse with him would secure, spoke of the society into which he might probably enter, and of his chances of making friends.

So the epistle continued for sheets; full of himself, containing no word concerning her, no reference to the past, no looking forward to a future with which she was associated.

"She will be glad to receive this letter," he said, folding and addressing the envelope, feeling he had done a very meritorious action in giving her this pleasure, whilst forgetting it afforded him considerable satisfaction.

As he went out into the quiet night to post his letters, he thought of the evening he had walked in the rectory garden with this girl, telling her of his intended departure. The whole scene came up before him; he remembered the expression of her face, the sorrow shining in her eyes, the tone of her voice when declaring she should remember him always.

"Poor Madge, she is the dearest girl in the world," he said and in another second he had forgotten her.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. MUNDELLA RYSTON.

AT the end of the first week which Fitzmaurice spent under Sir Lawrence's roof, the baronet said to him :

"Fitzmaurice I think we shall get on capitally. When people have lived a little while together, they begin to understand each other's ways and habits, and fit into each other's characters like parts of a puzzle. This is one of the reasons why men and women unsuited to each other harmonise in married life. Ah ! what was I about to say ?—yes, I remember, this day fortnight I give a dinner, you shall write the invitations to-morrow. Of course you will consider yourself included in the party ; you will meet some distinguished men and clever women, it will be an excellent opportunity for you to make their acquaintance."

Fitzmaurice bowed but made no reply ; he had come to the knowledge Sir Lawrence disliked answers when in the mood for conversing.

"Meanwhile," continued the baronet, "allow me to recommend you as a friend, if you want clothes, to call on my tailor Balam ; he is an excellent man, endowed with great judgment and good taste, you may leave everything to him. Such individuals are more valuable and rarer than statesmen. Tell him I desire him to supply you—we can arrange the matter afterwards."

"Thank you," said Maurice.

"To a young man beginning a career," he added,

"dress is one of the most important things, it is often the chief element of his success ; and women, who play an important part in a man's social advancement, are always influenced by such matters as the turn of a collar or the cut of a coat. No badly dressed man under the rank of a duke ever became popular ; an ill-fitting suit is more damaging in the eyes of the world than the worst reputation."

Sir Lawrence Usher was remarkable for the excellence of his dinners, likewise for the quality of his friends. To become his guest was a social distinction. Rank was not a qualification to induce the baronet to welcome its possessors ; genius was found at his board.

"Though a famous personage," he said, "may not speak three remarkable sentences in an hour, yet his general conversation must be interesting, for words flow from a man in conformity with the bent of his mind, as water does from a vessel according to the shape of its mouth."

To this dinner the baronet had bidden a professor, famous as a historian ; a celebrated painter and his wife ; a monsignor, out of favour with the cardinal ; an ambassador and his wife, remarkable for her magnificent shoulders and wonderful rubies ; a noble marquis who had travelled far, and told strange tales, a member of the cabinet and his wife, who was alike beautiful and attractive, and of whom the world had consequently said hard things. Other guests were invited for the latter part of the evening ; Sir Lawrence's sister, the Duchess of Bloomsbury, consented to receive her brother's friends.

When Sir Lawrence entered the drawing-room, where her grace was waiting to welcome the guests, he was in high spirits. His valet had succeeded in packing him into a dress suit of a remarkably fine

figure; his bright auburn wig looked particularly juvenile, wrinkles had by some secret process been erased from his face; his moustache carefully dyed and waxed was a triumph of art, and a faint becoming colour never deepening or diminishing tinged his cheeks. Altogether, he looked wonderfully young, bright, graceful and artificial.

"Ah, duchess," he said advancing with a light tread to where she sat, "you are in excellent time. I feared my guests might arrive before you, and was nervous until I heard you had come."

"Tell me," said the duchess rather abruptly, waving her fan as if to waft aside her brother's flow of verbal exuberance, "whom you have asked; one never feels sure of the people they may meet at your table. I shouldn't be surprised to sit *vis-à-vis* with a famous tight-rope dancer or a tattooed lady, I am never astonished at anything you do."

"You should not entertain such sisterly doubts of me," he replied smiling as she gathered her brows, and then smoothed her silver hair under a cap, covered with pearls.

He mentioned the names of his guests, on whom she passed various comments as he proceeded.

"I like the monsignor," she said; "he is always agreeable and doesn't try to convert me as he does other people."

"Out of compliment to your strong mind Maria," said Sir Lawrence, soothingly.

"Or rather to my strong faith," she replied, flinging back her head with a sudden gesture; the lace of her cap fluttered and the pearls nudged each other as if they had heard her utter a good thing.

"You need not have asked the Mundella Rystons," she said, after a pause.

"He is a cabinet minister, and a clever useful man."

"Or rather she is an agreeable woman."

"So the world says," replied Sir Lawrence quietly.

"And the world has said other things about her too—not that I believe them I'm sure," said her grace, with an austere face and a look of reproach at her fan.

"Certainly not, we never believe what the world says—it is a sad liar, its breath is calumny, its food detraction, its——"

"And who is this?" interrupted the duchess looking towards the door.

Sir Lawrence turned and saw Maurice entering the room, his tall supple figure clad in evening dress, his face bright with expectation, a look in his grey-blue eyes at once humorous, and cynical.

"This," said the baronet introducing him, "is Mr. Fitzmaurice, son of my old friend Ulic Fitzmaurice of Grantsborough, whom you remember."

The duchess bowed graciously, looked at him a second, and then held out her hand.

"You are not quite a stranger to me," she said, "I knew your father very well."

She had known and loved him, almost half a century ago, and this young man standing before her recalled to her mind many memories that had lain hidden in its depths for long.

"Sit down by me," she said regarding him with a smiling affability he did not fail to observe—"sit down and tell me about Grantsborough and your father and how you came to London."

Fitzmaurice, who had never seen a duchess in his life, sat beside her, and answered her questions until the first batch of guests arrived.

The dinner was almost a banquet. The table glittered with gold plate which had once belonged to an exiled king whose arms they bore. Monsieur

Gravie excelled himself on this occasion, having an idea the ambassador could help him to his longed-for dignity of knighthood, the dishes he furnished for his benefit were the highest efforts of a great and cultured genius, the wines sparkling in the glasses had not seen the light of day for half a century.

True to his principles Sir Lawrence was silent during the meal; his guests understanding his feelings, respected them, without following his example, he having no objection to be diverted, so long as he was not called on to contribute towards the verbal entertainment of others.

The ambassador gracefully unbending, talked to the great artist on Aumonier's carvings, on the genius of Ary Scheffer, and the position which etchings held in the world of art. The monsignor conversed with the duchess in a subdued tone, implying a flattering confidence that pleased her grace exceedingly, though his subject was commonplace and bore no reference to the probabilities of his restoration.

The l'Ambassadrice had little to say, but listened politely to the cabinet minister's views on preachers of the day. Her intelligence was small, her beauty great. Nature had blessed her with shoulders that were the envy of courts, her husband had presented her with rubies the most famous in Europe, she had therefore no cause to quarrel with Fate.

Fitzmaurice sat next the cabinet minister's wife, the Honourable Mrs. Mundella Ryston, of whom the world had said hard things. She might still be considered young, and was certainly beautiful; her figure was tall, lithe, and graceful, her face, fair and oval-shaped, was animated by expressive dark eyes, her hair was bright brown.

Fitzmaurice's susceptibility made him fully ap-

preciate the grace and symmetry of her form, the inexpressible charm of her features.

Mrs. Mundella Ryston had when young and almost alone in life, married at the instigation of her friends, a man with whom she had no sympathies, for whom she had no love. She was an orphan, and a ward in Chancery, he a man who had already gained distinction in the political world, of whom great things were expected in the future. She gave him wealth, he gave her distinction, and society decided it was a desirable marriage for both parties, in other words it was an excellent bargain.

But when a few years had passed, and Mr. Mundella Ryston's feelings towards the woman he had made his wife never advanced from courtesy to affection, she became aware that in heeding the advice of friends she had made a life's mistake; that she must remain a stranger to the happiness for which she longed in vain.

She had taken a step there was no regaining, but she was too proud to share her secret with the world. She might not enjoy the affection her susceptible nature were capable of returning, but there were pleasures and excitements society held out which she might experience, and in their enjoyment perhaps forget the coldness holding her inner life in frozen bonds.

So it happened Mrs. Mundella Ryston, who in the earlier years of her married life had been retiring, became a leader of society. For this she was eminently suited. Her husband's name, as a man whose counsel had swayed the affairs of Europe gave her reputation; her beauty, varied talents, and grace of manner imparted a fascination which led society captive.

Her entertainments were brilliant and exclusive,

as no man or woman without claim to distinction or pretension to ability ever entered her doors.

Her husband was pleased with her success: in plans for the amusement of herself or her friends he never interfered. He was too deeply plunged in a world of his own to render her assistance in social schemes, and had too much interest in the affairs of nations to have any for his own home; he was therefore seldom seen in her salons.

The world praised Mrs. Mundella Ryston, dwelt admiringly on her gifts, and recognized her genius; but with lynx eyes began quickly to perceive she was not a happy woman: arriving at this conclusion, society began to speculate, to look wise, and finally to whisper; Mrs. Mundella Ryston was gifted, amiable, and brilliant, but she must not hope to escape untainted by the general scandal, with which the world marks its own.

She had been too successful, and society determined if possible to humble her; to chasten her spirit so that the vile sin of pride should find no harbour in her heart. For the accomplishment of this righteous purpose, society opened its eyes and fixed them on her unflinchingly.

It happened that one day her husband introduced to her a foreigner of distinction, a clever man with the air of one bred in courts and the passions of a man born in the South.

He was entrusted with a diplomatic mission which might render his sojourn in England one of considerable length; meanwhile, he made friends with Mrs. Mundella Ryston. The young wife found his society agreeable; he was as conversant with art as with politics; had lived in every capital of Europe; was the favourite of courts; had readily won women's hearts, and now he fell in love with the Cabinet Minister's wife.

Though wisely concealing the fact from her, he could not hide it from those surrounding her. He became her constant companion—was ever by her side; she was either ignorant or defiant of what the world saw and said, and in this she deeply erred.

Charming Madame de Montespan, whilst the chosen friend of Louis Quatorze, kept her Lents strictly, had her daily allowance of bread weighed for her, and preserved the favour of the Church; but Mrs. Mundella Ryston was heedless of the world, and in return it slandered her.

The end came quickly and simply.

It happened one day the man whose name had been whispered with hers in a thousand drawing-rooms, raised her hand to his lips. It was a courteous action, but in a second revealed to her the depths of his feelings and of hers, as lightning shows a precipice to one travelling in darkness.

He saw the opportunity had come for which he had waited, and pleaded for her love. She did not dally with temptation; but told him they must meet no more.

He left England next day, and society gossiped concerning the cause of his absence. Occasionally it will overlook a woman's weakness, if she be not clever; but, if gifted with more intellect than her neighbours, she may hope for mercy in vain.

Once, when one of the kind friends, not too rarely encountered in all stations and under all circumstances of life, told her what cruel words the world spoke of her, she laughed. When her friend departed, she said to herself:

"It is a mistake to take life gravely; it is far better to laugh than to cry, and best keep our tragedies for our hearts."

She strove to laugh, but her effort was broken by a sob, and her smiles washed out her tears.

Next week the attendance at her rooms was thinner than usual. She was an innocent woman, and the world's treatment wounded her. The season was not over when she suddenly left town. People talked, society lied, the world nodded its head.

Before the next season, her husband had made a great political *coup*, and realised in part the expectations of ministerial wisdom which had been formed of him, Mrs. Mundella Ryston again became the fashion. Verbal spite does not destroy the beauty of a woman's face or ruin the charm of her manner, society once more acknowledged her fascination, and she resumed the position all but lost through her innocence.

"You are a friend of Sir Lawrence?" she said, interrogatively, to Fitzmaurice when the entrées were removed.

"I am his secretary," he answered. "My father and he were friends years ago."

"I am not sure that we have met before," she said, with one of her winning smiles.

"I should have certainly remembered if we had," he replied, adding, "I haven't been a month in London."

She leaned back and looked at him.

"Do you know I quite envy you," she said, in a low voice whose merest note was music.

"Then, I am indeed fortunate."

"Women generally like flattery," she replied, "but, as a rule I don't care for it; you make me envious because you are beginning life; you stand on the threshold of an unknown land, with many paths before you from which to choose. How old are you?"

"I shall soon be one-and-twenty."

"That is young for a man."

"And for a woman?"

"Well, a woman is always young and always old," she answered.

"I feel," said Maurice, "as if I were already old."

"People who think a good deal always feel so; thought brings maturity, just as years bring experience," she replied.

"Perhaps," he said raising his eyes suddenly and catching her gaze fixed on him intently.

The noble marquis, who had travelled much, having dined to his satisfaction, now narrated one of those remarkable adventures he was always asked "to throw into book form" by his friends; not that they intended reading them, but because they considered this expression of their desire a compliment, certain to please him.

The narrative he had reserved for Sir Lawrence's dinner-table was sensational to the last degree; he as usual was the hero of his story, the villain on this occasion being a Greek lunatic who stabbed him in the sole of his left foot.

It was full of blood-thirsty details, which made her grace's cap tremble with horror, and the pearls shake from fear. It lasted until the ladies rose.

"When you presently join us in the drawing-room," said Mrs. Mundella Ryston, to Fitzmaurice, "Sir Lawrence is sure to sit by me; he likes being amused after dinner, and he is sometimes interesting. But when he leaves you must come and take his place, I want to talk to you. Sir Lawrence is decidedly charming and very old; but then," she concluded, "we must all live to be old."

"Yes," replied Fitzmaurice, "unless we die young."

CHAPTER XIII.

EDWARD BOLGER'S LETTER.

THE townland of Ballyrogan was an important property, situated seven miles from Grantsborough. It had never given its landlord Sir Lawrence Usher, or his agent Mr. Delahunt trouble. The tenants were comfortable farmers holding their lands at fair rents by reason of leases granted by the present proprietor's father.

In March of this year these leases expired, and the tenants were called upon to pay rents they justly considered exorbitant. As a result disturbance, long foreseen and some time feared, arose between them and the agent.

This man was an excellent type of his class. In early life he had been a practising solicitor, and had through energy and interest obtained the agency he at present held, in which he quickly waxed fat and prosperous. Relieved from the immediate authority of Sir Lawrence, he assumed an air of despotism when dealing with the tenantry, before which they bowed in helpless subserviency. To them he was a power wielding their fate, a being within whose reach it lay to render their lots miserable or happy, one on whom their total dependence rested, a man they regarded as a secondary Providence.

In his dealings with them he was arrogant and arbitrary; in his relations with Sir Lawrence a paltry sycophant. Being his interest, it became

his study to keep tenant and landlord apart, and unfortunately Sir Lawrence's love of English society rendered this desire easy of accomplishment.

In no instance had the tenants ever appealed to their landlord, but had accepted his agent's dictum as hopelessly irretrievable.

Delahunt had never looked on the Ballyrogan tenantry with favour; their long leases had heretofore given them a certain independence in business transactions which he resented; they were comparatively beyond his reach, he powerless to exact a high rental from them. When therefore the Ballyrogan leases expired, he announced his intention of increasing their rents; as he received a per centage on the rent roll, it was a matter of personal advantage it should be fixed at a high rate, the Ballyrogan farmers were therefore in sore distress.

The largest landholder amongst them was Edward Bolger a man young in years, whose naturally good intellect had been sharpened by a short time spent in the diocesan college. From this fact, as well as from the unusual amount of independence he had always betrayed, he was held in high esteem by his neighbours, and in the crisis at which they now arrived, his interference on their behalf was unanimously expected.

It therefore happened early in June that Edward Bolger having consulted his friends, donned his Sunday frock-coat and best hat and rode down to Grantsborough that he might have an interview with Delahunt.

That gentleman considering arrogance the best means of inspiring awe into the souls of the tenants, received Bolger with an insolent air on admitting him to his presence. He listened to pleas for abatement of the rents he had fixed with stern un-

graciousness, terminating the interview in a towering passion, believing this a stroke of policy which would have due effect in bringing "the fellow to his senses."

To his astonishment Bolger listened with calmness, betrayed no symptoms of fear, replied unabashed, and maintained a tone of independence which led him to be regarded from that hour as a dangerous man tainted with unsound principles.

The interview wrought no good, and Edward Bolger rode back to his friends convinced it was hopeless to expect justice from the agent. He was deeply troubled, but was not without hope.

The following Sunday after "last mass" he encountered some of his neighbours with whom he talked earnestly in the chapel-yard. He told them freely what had passed between himself and Delahunt, and then added :

"I won't say any more just now; meet me to-morrow night at Sheehan's o' the cross-roads at eight o'clock, and then we will talk the subject over. The less we say about the matter the better, maybe; but let every one o' you meet me there, an' let some o' you go round this evening to the houses of any o' the Ballyrogan tenants that's not here to-day, an' tell them what I've said."

When he arrived at the cross-roads on Monday evening, a crowd of men young and old, numbering about forty in all, waited his coming. He looked at them with a glance of satisfaction and pleasure.

"Are we all here?" he asked.

"All but ould Tom Murphy, who's bad with the rheumatis, but he sent his son Billy instead.

"He'll do just as well, an' I'm glad you're all come, because when men are united they can accomplish much that singly they would be powerless to effect. Let us go into Sheehan's an' have a talk."

Sheehan's was a long low whitewashed straw-thatched house, in one of its small square-paned windows three long-stemmed pipes, as many sundried cakes, and a glass bottle of sweetmeats were exposed; above this window, painted in small white letters on a black board, ran the legend that James Sheehan had licence to sell spirits, beer, tea, and tobacco; these, with the additions of candles and snuff, were vended over a counter about four feet long standing at one end of the kitchen.

This was a large apartment with a clay floor, having a wide-open brickwork chimney. The furniture consisted of a dresser ornamented with earthenware, a settle serving as a bed by night, and several chairs, as clean as hard scrubbing could possibly make them.

Communicating with the kitchen by a small door was another room, called by courtesy the parlour, a long narrow apartment ceilinged and whitewashed. The floor was boarded, and shone with freestone, portraits of political celebrities hung on the far wall, flanked by highly-coloured religious pictures, an American clock rested on the chimney-piece.

In the centre of the room stood a long deal table, with forms of equal length on either side, and chairs at the top and bottom.

When the Ballyrogan tenants entered Sheehan's house they walked into this room with the appearance of men who had business to transact, and were therefore in no humour to linger for a friendly gossip with pleasant homely Mrs. Sheehan, or her pretty daughter Nelly, an acknowledged belle whose mischievous dark eyes had before now made the hearts of the younger men beat quicker than their wont.

With much shuffling of feet and noise they seated themselves at the table; Bolger sat at the

head as their rightful chairman. A couple of lamps were already burning on the chimney-piece, though there was scarce yet necessity for their radiance, as the light of this June evening had not quite faded from the sky.

One thirsty soul of the party, probably overcome by the associations of the room, suggested they should have beer; but the chairman replied drily:

"We'll hold our meeting first, an' then we'll have some beer afterwards; but we'll trouble Mrs. Sheehan for a pen and ink."

This looked like business. When these were placed before Edward Bolger, and the door closed, he began to speak in ordinary conversational tone, without pretence at speech making.

He was a fine well-made fellow, over six feet in height, with a coarse intelligent face, dark blue eyes, and light hair curling round a well-shaped head.

When he spoke his delivery was slow, but he gave utterance to his words with the assurance of a man who has intelligence to communicate, and was listened to with the ready attention Irishmen invariably pay those possessing the gift of expressing ideas clearly,

"You all know that we have met here to-night to talk over our disagreement with Delahunt," he began resting his arms on the table and leaning anxiously forward. "We never had words with him, before me friends, because he never had the chance of meddling with us, but now he begins to show his teeth."

"'Twill be the worse for him if he bites," said a deep-chested, black-whiskered man, who finished his sentence with a wild laugh.

"We always lived in peace," continued Edward Bolger unheeding the interruption, "an' we always want to live in quietness if we can."

"But sure if we can't the Ballyrogan tenants are not the men to give in, an' appear beaten by a fellow that was nothin' more than a mane 'torney's clerk a few years ago," said Walsh the man who had spoken before.

"There's one thing sure," continued Bolger, "that we can never get the rent he wants out of our farms; nor will he ever get it, me friends, if we all act as true men towards each other; we are all in the same boat, and if we pull together there's not much fear for us; it was want of unity that always destroyed this unfortunate country."

"Be gad, you're right Edward Bolger," said Fardy, an old man with a shrewd looking face wrinkled and brown, as if carved in wood, whose dark eyes were overhung by iron-grey eyebrows. "He'll hardly like to turn us all out on the road as he did the widow Bryan when her lease was out last year, an' she not able to pay her quarter's rent."

"Let us keep together anyhow," said one of the tenants.

"That we will," the others answered.

"That's the style me boys," said Fardy, taking off a high silk hat, much the worse for wear, into which he dived his hand and drew forth a red cotton handkerchief with which he wiped his face deliberately.

"Maybe it's not come to any struggle with us yet," said Bolger leaning back in his chair and looking placidly round at the eager faces lining both sides of the table. "An idea occurred to me the other day," he continued, "as I rode home from seeing Delahunt; an' I thought I'd just like to get you all here to-night and mention it."

He paused to note the effect of his words, all turned their eyes with new interest on his face.

"Sure it's yoursel' has the head-piece, anyhow," said the owner of the carved-wood countenance, "an' I always said as much."

"Well, this is what occurred to me. You know these agents acting as middle men, an' coming between landlord an' tenant, have always done a deal o' mischief in the country; they prejudice the one against the other, and succeed in injuring both."

"Thru for you," interrupted Walsh.

"They are generally a bad lot," continued Edward Bolger, "an' Delahunt is no exception to the rule."

"Divil a bit," said Fardy.

"Well my opinion is that Sir Lawrence is in perfect ignorance about his estate. I'm thinking it wouldn't be hard to keep him in that state, for he has little love for his country, or he wouldn't remain out of it so long; but I must say he was always a good landlord whenever he dealt with the tenants."

"Ne'er a betther, we'll say that for him anyhow."

"But, as the saying is, one half the world don't know how the other half lives; an' Sir Lawrence, I'd give me word knows little about his tenants, but is fond o' mixing with the lords an' dukes an' that lot he meets in London an' Paris an' other fine cities. Now I'm thinking he knows nothing about the Ballyrogan rents being raised, for you see Delahunt is paid by percentage, an' the more he gets out of us, the more he puts in his own pocket."

"Sure I said he had the fine head-piece," remarked the little man, smiling approvingly at his own sagacity.

"Now, what I propose to do," said Edward Bolger, looking from one face to the other, "is to

write to Sir Lawrence an' lay the whole case before him in plain English, an' have every one of us to sign our names to it."

They were all silent for a second or two, for the announcement had taken them by surprise; the spell it cast upon them was only broken by Walsh giving the table a blow that had the force of a sledge hammer.

"Be the powers you're a man," he said; "we'll do it, an' though I don't write me name mesel' me eldest boy'll do for me in elegant style."

"We will, we will," the others answered.

"It would be a bould thing to do, Edward Bolger, t' pass over the agint's head in that way," said the little man to whom such a proposal seemed nothing short of conspiracy against the ruling power; "but as you're ready to do it, ould Jack Fardy is not the man to go agin you," he concluded, slapping his knee with a hand made hard as horn by daily toil.

"'Twould be a good day for all the tenants that Sir Lawrence came over," said Bolger, "an' sure we might drop him a hint to that effect without doing any harm."

"Well whenever he was here, things were different, an' with all his grand ways 'twas as aisy t' spake t' him as if 'twas a child; an' he was always mighty p'lite, an' never yet turned a man out iv his place, nor I don't believe he'd let it be done aither, iv he knew iv it, that I don't."

"The divil take Delahunt, I say, an' the sooner the betther," said Walsh.

"An' it's much the betther the divil I'd be o' such a prize," said another voice.

"Think o' the mane thrick he played on Matty Nowlan t' other day," continued Walsh. "Matty wasn't able to pay his rent last quarther day, an' he was waiting for the fair of Kilkenny to sell wan o'

the purtiest little mares you ever set an eye on; he expected to get eighty pounds for her, for she was well broke in and elegantly thrained; but, a couple o' days afore the fair, up came the play-boy Delahunt, an' he offers him forty pounds for her; an' what with half threatenin' him an' whole persuadin' him, he made Matty give him the mare; an' sure he'd have found it the worst for him in the long run if he didn't."

"Ay, an' many's the thrick he played like that afore, the mane rascal."

"Well, it's worth while trying what Sir Lawrence will do anyhow," said Bolger coming back to his proposal; "he was never a bad man with his tenants, an' maybe he wouldn't commence to be that same with us now."

"Never a bit of him," said Walsh.

"Well me friends here's the letter ready written," said Bolger, "an' it only waits for you to sign your names to it, an' I'll send it off to London meself in the morning."

Suspecting beforehand they would agree to his proposal, he had carefully written the letter he now produced and read to them. In fair language it gave an account of their grievances, and, apologising for addressing Sir Lawrence, expressed a desire to arrange with him, as he had always treated them leniently.

"There's nothing like being a scholard, anyhow," said Walsh, admiringly, "an' it's the elegant wan you are, Edward Bolger; you shows the college edecation, me boy, an' no mistake."

"An' it's the fine priest was lost in him," said another voice from the opposite side of the table.

"Maybe that's the betther for us," remarked Fardy, drily.

"An' for some one else that I won't mention fearing her ears might get red," said one of the younger men slyly, whereon they all laughed, and Bolger blushed like a schoolboy.

One by one they signed the letter; those not able to write making their marks. To them it was a matter of much responsibility.

"It may be an elegant thing to be a scholard," said old Jack Fardy, as they separated after imbibing some beer, a fact that made him inclined to be garrulous, "an' they say it's edecation bates the world entirely, but I doubt if 'twill get the betther of Delahunt, anyhow."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DUCHESS OF BLOOMSBURY'S RECEPTION.

"Do you know you interest me much?" said Mrs. Mundella Ryston to Maurice.

She was seated in a corner of one of the Duchess of Bloomsbury's saloons; the occasion being one of her grace's receptions which were usually magnificent and always famous.

Maurice, standing by Mrs. Mundella Ryston's side, looked down at her and laughed softly. Such words coming from the lips of a charming woman were sufficient to make a young man satisfied with himself and the world at large. To-night she was more fascinating than ever, the beauty of her fair complexion, the lustre of her eyes, the colour of her chestnut hair appealed to his sense of beauty.

"I had imagined," he said, "you regarded me with sufficient friendship to dispense with compliments!"

"This is truth," she replied without smiling.

"You are young, ambitious, hopeful; life lies before you. I would not say this if I thought you were vain, but I fancy your desire for advancement leaves no room for vanity."

"It is not the sin of my sex," he said.

"That is ungallant, and moreover untrue, for this sin like all others is not limited to one sex. I think men are the vainest of creatures, and women follow suit merely because they strive to imitate them in all things. As for me, I could no more live without vanity than Madame l'Ambassadrice could without her rubies; it is my pet sin, and it is a satisfaction to know, as a very clever woman once said, one can never outlive one's vanity; it is a heavenly blessing for which we cannot feel too thankful" she concluded with a smile that lit her dark eyes and brightened the repose of her face.

Fitzmaurice had been three months in London, during which time a vast change had taken place in him.

From the first he had carefully though quietly observed Sir Lawrence's ways and habits and adapted himself to them; noted his idiosyncrasies and humoured them, studied his varying moods and suited himself to their requirements. In return he had gained a hold on the baronet's interests and regards.

As the protégé of Sir Lawrence who introduced him to his circle as the son of an old friend, and as a favourite of her Grace of Bloomsbury, he went freely into the best society where he gained the good opinions of many.

The constant companionship of the baronet, and association with the polished circle of his new friends, were not without due effect upon him. His quick perception led him to observe and appreciate the courteous bearing of those about

him ; his natural gifts rendered acquaintance with those who could be of service comparatively easy, his delicate sense of tact enabled him to steer clear of social difficulties besetting his path.

In his bearing towards men he was reserved and cold ; but his deferential manners towards women never failed to impress them favourably. His intuition had shown him it was not words alone that please them, but rather the graceful attention which accompanies admiration.

Though he had made the acquaintance of several women, there was but one with whom he had established a sincere friendship. Mrs. Mundella Ryston had after their first night's conversation in Sir Lawrence's drawing-room, proved herself his friend.

Her name and position in society were now more powerful than ever. She had welcomed him as a favoured guest to her house, where she had introduced him to many men and women whose names were famous and familiar on the world's lips.

A woman of many gifts, of singular beauty and great attraction, she was yet a stranger to happiness. Trifles floating on the surface of daily occurrences, had revealed this fact which helped him to understand her position and gradually to bind them in a bond of friendship both felt though neither avowed.

"And so you leave town shortly," Mrs. Mundella Ryston said.

"Yes, in three days Sir Lawrence goes to Ireland. I accompany him, of course."

"And in another week half the people in this room will have dispersed north, south, east, and west. How hot it is ! Do you know I always think the termination of a season like the end of life."

"Why such a woful comparison ? "

"Is the fact of ending existence woful?" she asked quickly, and then continued. "At the beginning it promises much, and when the end comes little has been accomplished."

"But then," said Maurice, "it is unlike death in so much that next year you begin a new season over again."

"And who knows but death may be but the beginning of a new life and a better," she answered with a smile having more of sadness than hope in its expression.

Presently she said.

"Are you content with your first experience of London life?"

"If I had but the sole privilege of knowing you," he answered, "it would be sufficient to make me satisfied."

"Are you in earnest or is this but a fashion of speech?"

"I am quite sincere,—you don't doubt me?" he asked.

She paused a moment and looked in his face before replying.

"No."

A vast crowd surged around them. Her Grace's salons were magnificent apartments, spacious, lofty, splendid in gilded cornices, and arched and painted ceilings from which chandeliers of carved silver, crystal, and spar depended.

It was her last reception, for August being at hand society was already on the wing. The duchess, fond of dabbling in politics, looked upon herself as the social leader of her party without whose aid it could not be united. Ministers, ambassadors, and distinguished politicians, accepted the invitations of a hostess the fame of whose receptions were lauded through Europe.

"Who is the man speaking to Lady Arthur Fields?" asked the Countess of Everfair, raising her gold-rimmed eye-glasses, of Mr. Newton Marrix, whose political opinions expressed in the columns of a daily journal were supposed to carry considerable influence.

"Don't you know him?" asked the author.

"No: is he anyone I should know?" said the countess.

"The American minister."

"He certainly looks like a Yankee."

"He is universally popular."

"Dear me," said Lady Everfair, "if he is at the present moment in possession of a cabinet secret, that woman will extract it from him and sell it; but I don't know if republics have state secrets like other governments."

"Have secrets," repeated Newton Marrix, who delighted in tantalizing her whenever opportunity permitted; "why republics are brimful of the darkest secrets; they continually plot against all monarchical forms of government, and are as dangerous to meddle with as bomb-shells."

"You horrify me," she exclaimed, dropping her fan and raising her hands like a mechanical toy.

"Its true," he added cheerfully, "but I think the American minister's secrets will not be divulged to Lady Arthur Fields."

"Oh you do not know her," said the countess sweetly, "she is the most insinuating and treacherous of women."

"How interesting," replied Newton Marrix.

Lady Everfair looked in the direction where the most treacherous of women was standing, beaming with smiles, and delighting a little circle of male friends who had gathered round her.

The countess's brows—works of art—met, and her exquisitely cut lips curled disdainfully.

"Her husband is the third son of a Scotch marquis who hasn't a penny to spare, is deeply in debt, and hand in glove with the Jews and yet his wife's diamonds are magnificent and not paste, and her horses the best in the Row," said Lady Everfair with a mysterious nod and a regretful sigh.

Her ladyship delighted in scandal, and was never so happy as when detailing choice morsels to friendly ears. On the principle of St. Evremonde, who declared the rule for conquering passions was to freely indulge them, she, opportunity permitting, dealt out scandal with a liberal hand.

"And how does Lady Arthur manage?" asked Newton Marrix innocently.

"How?" said the countess, with a backward jerk of her head, indicative of virtuous indignation. "Why, her income may be compared to death—it is the wages of sin."

In another salon sat Madame l'Ambassadrice all shoulders and rubies.

"One sees so much of her," Lady Everfair said.

Sir Lawrence Usher sat beside her, entertaining her with specimens of his choicest brilliancy.

Madame l'Ambassadrice being created to inspire admiration by her physical gifts, was not warranted to converse.

"You say you don't like my sex, how hard-hearted," said Sir Lawrence, elevating his brows to a curve that did duty for a smile.

"There are exceptions," she replied turning away that her shoulders might be seen at a different angle. Sir Lawrence waited until her head resumed its former position, and then made her a courtly bow.

"You are generous," he said.

"Though hard-hearted?"

"I withdraw the expression, which I could never have used to you in seriousness."

Madame l'Ambassadrice smiled.

"I had once a dear old aunt who, though the kindest soul in the world, hated men. She had banished her *fiancé* because he gave snuff to a pet monkey. Her lover never returned, but her pet lived for years to solace her life. 'A monkey,' she would say, in the latter years of her existence, 'makes us laugh, a man often makes us cry; a monkey plays tricks to amuse us, but a man plays them to deceive us; a monkey breaks our china, but a man breaks our hearts.'"

"Poor soul," said l'Ambassadrice.

"You don't agree with these sentiments, I hope?"

"How can you think so?" she responded, with another movement of her bewitching shoulders.

"Ah, Sir Lawrence," said a smiling bustling man, advancing and bowing to l'Ambassadrice, who honoured him with a gracious smile.

This was Mr. Mullins an Irishman whom the world familiarly called Johnny. He was frequently to be seen in the card-rooms of the clubs to which he belonged, and invariably on every race-course within a hundred miles radius of town.

Out of season he visited the best country houses, and occasionally went yachting with Lord Alfred Paget his personal friend. He was often seated at dinner tables in high places, and in order to secure his presence it was necessary to invite him a month in advance. He had rooms in an eminently quiet street in the convenient district of Piccadilly, and kept a bull terrier.

"I have seen you flirting with Miss Gayer, Sir

Lawrence," he said, with a characteristic chuckle that never failed to create mirth, "but take care, you are a fascinating man, and do you know, madame" (turning to l'Ambassadrice), "she brought an action for breach of promise last year when everyone was out of town, against young Trifle of the Guards—a most amusing affair, his letters were marvellously idiotic—and she got damages for two thousand pounds awarded by an honest British jury wrathful at the wrongs and deceptions practised by a lover with a changeful mind."

"He paid for his change," said the Baronet.

"He should not have trifled with her feelings," said l'Ambassadrice with a smile.

"Her feelings are aged thirty-seven," said Mr. Mullins, "and Trifle is one and twenty."

"Change was a luxury he could not afford; he should have been true to the lady," said the baronet.

"But you can afford it Sir Lawrence."

"You are droll," said Madame.

"Now a sigh in her ears means a thousand pounds, and a line from the poets—you are fond of the poets Sir Lawrence,—as much more, and they are rather dear at that rate."

"Rather, but forewarned is forearmed."

"I'll tell you a good story," said Mr. Mullins, who was never so happy as when narrating one of his amusing tales, which he kept in a handy drawer in the cabinet of his memory ready for production at the shortest notice; "it occurred to myself, it did indeed."

"Which makes it more interesting."

"Thanks. I was playing at bezique with her one night shortly after the breach of promise, of which I was not at all aware; she lost the game, and I said to her, 'Well, Miss Gayer, ill-luck at cards

means luck in love.' She has not forgiven me since."

When Mrs. Mundella Ryston was about to leave, Fitzmaurice said :

"May I call before you leave town?"

"Certainly," she answered, "come to-morrow afternoon at five, I shall expect you."

CHAPTER XV.

A CONFIDENTIAL CONVERSATION.

It happened the letter which Edward Bolger had written and the tenants signed came to Sir Lawrence at an opportune moment. It was the middle of June, and he had not decided where he should spend the autumn.

He had received numerous invitations to country-houses, had thought of Switzerland, and spoken of German baths; when Edgar Bolger's letter arrived it decided his course, and he determined on visiting Usher Park House.

Four years had elapsed since he had been in Ireland, he wondered why so long a time had passed since his last visit. Though doing little for his tenants and holding no personal communication with them, he felt a mutual good understanding existed between them; that nothing might interrupt this, he had given orders no harsh measures were to be used in dealing with them. In this he considered the whole duty of a landlord lay, and his conscience was therefore at rest concerning them.

On Bolger's letter reaching him he was surprised and angry, for it struck him the agreement between himself and his tenants was not quite so

perfect as he had believed or as they desired. His estate was regarded as a model property in the south of Ireland, and he felt proud of the distinction. His father and grandfather, and their fathers before them, had lived amongst their people, and between them had ever existed a feeling of mutual goodwill and kindness which he, though not a resident landlord, had never intended should be broken.

Delahunt had reminded him that the lease of the Ballyrogan property had expired, and insinuated a fair increase of rent should be asked, but had not stated the amount fixed, or hinted that any disturbance had ensued. Sir Lawrence immediately decided on investigating the matter himself. He at once wrote informing his agent of this resolution, and likewise to Bolger, who from such an honour falling to him as well as for the victory he was possibly about to gain, was regarded by his neighbours as the Napoleon of his race.

At the hour mentioned by Mrs. Mundella Ryston, Fitzmaurice called to make his adieux. He found her alone, a look of weariness on her pale face, regret dwelling in her eyes.

"You will feel glad to see your home again," she said.

"I can scarcely say I shall. It has never held pleasant associations for me," he answered even whilst his thoughts went back to the Rectory and the girl who promised never to forget him.

"But Nature will at least be welcome to your sight."

"I'm afraid her monotony will bore me."

"Surely the wilderness over which you shot, the Nore in which you fished, the woods where you dreamt, will seem as the faces of old friends welcoming your return."

"But they are all connected with recollections of

inward strife and outward struggle for daily existence."

He had told her long ago the story of his life, and felt no shame in the confession of his poverty. His words grated on her now: but she would not admit he was devoid of feeling.

"Your father will find you have changed."

"To every man upon this earth change cometh soon or late," he replied lightly.

"I am serious."

"Then am I likewise. I hope I shall never alter towards you."

She regarded him, wondering if this was but one of the conventional phrases he had learned so patly, or if truth underlay his words. Being generous she gave him the benefit of her doubt.

"I have felt interested in you from the first time we met, and I should like to be your friend."

"You have been," he answered, "that I shall always remember."

"I fancy you have a career before you, and a woman can sometimes help where a man would be powerless."

"Say always; women's wit has helped the greatest men, women's influence has shaped the world."

"Helped and influenced, yes; but I believe it lies in man's hands alone to make or mar his life."

"If this were true," he said, then paused.

"Continue," she said.

"I am wondering how far we are helped or defeated by Fate."

"By our own actions must we work out our Fate."

"Are we free agents or appointed workers? Whilst imagining we wander uncontrolled, are we really guided by a destiny impossible to disobey?"

"Better not ask ourselves such riddles," she said. "You remember Keates describes the world as a place 'where but to think is to be full of sorrows and leaden-eyed despairs,' but I want you to be full of hopes and great desires. You are I know ambitious."

"I am, exceedingly."

"You haven't yet begun to realise your dreams."

"No, I don't see how I can."

"I do," she answered.

"By getting into Parliament? I had thought of that as a step in the proper direction."

"A famous statesman once said the greatest opportunity a British subject could be offered was a seat in the House of Commons. I fancy that day has passed. I spoke of a higher and perhaps a readier step towards accomplishing your desires," she said gravely.

"And that?" he asked, anxiously.

She steadied her voice to reply.

"You must marry wealth."

She turned her eyes away, knowing he was gazing at her. For a second he wondered if this suggestion was made for the purpose of testing his feelings, but the sight of her face convinced him her intention was to serve his interests.

"How can I who am penniless, marry wealth?" he asked after a pause which both felt irksome.

"That does not matter. You can accomplish what you strongly desire."

He shook his head incredulously, but otherwise made no reply.

"It is true," she said. "I believe one can obtain all one wishes by willing it greatly. This has been said before, but people don't believe it, yet it is a fact. Men fail because they don't invariably like what they desire, and that is necessary, for liking

gives strength to the desire, and when united they conquer Fate itself."

"I have no inclination to marry. I am yet young."

She lowered her eyes; not a muscle of her face stirred, but a faint colour came to her cheeks. After a while she said:

"A man is never too young to make a prosperous marriage; it gives him station and weight with the world, gains for him what years of toil might fail to accomplish. Money is a power in the land and when used as a lever to ambition can work miracles. Think of my suggestion and if you desire it I—I will help you."

"You are more than kind," he answered gravely, coldly. "If I had a prospect of a brilliant marriage just now, I should not regard it with pleasure." In some undefinable way he was hurt by her words, and refused to see the advantages she mentioned in a wealthy alliance. A spirit of discord awoke from the silence ensuing. He rose to take his departure.

"I hate saying farewell," he said with that abrupt air which helped to give a tone of originality to his manners. "To my friends I shall only say *au revoir*; farewell seems to admit the prospect of not meeting again. It is a cruel word."

"We return to town early in February for the opening of Parliament, so we shall probably meet early in the new year."

"I hope so. Sir Lawrence may remain but a very short time in Ireland. I fancy he will tire of it soon."

"And you?" she asked.

"I shall be glad to get back again to you—and," he added, after a second's pause, "my friends."

"I have hundreds of acquaintance," she said, pro-

longing the interview, "but few real friends, and I regard you as one. Am I mistaken?"

"No," he answered, promptly. "I trust we shall be friends to the last."

"Friendship with me is a sacred thing," she said. "It is not discovered every day, but when found should be prized above all the world holds well."

"Your friendship is to me," he replied, "not only a cause of pleasure, but a source of pride," he took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Write to me," she said as he departed.

When the sound of his footsteps died away on the stair, loneliness fell upon her.

CHAPTER XVI.

BACK AT GRANTSBOROUGH.

THE announcement of Sir Lawrence coming to Usher Park House for the autumn, created a sensation in Grantsborough, rising to a pitch of excitement in many social circles of that ancient borough.

That Fitzmaurice should return so soon, and in company with the baronet, was to Casey a source of delight he desired his neighbours to share. Therefore on the afternoon of the day when the news arrived, he hastened into the town, and selecting Miss Kennedy as most worthy to be the first recipient of the glad tidings, entered her shop, and gave its owner a military salute.

Miss Kennedy was a lady who had reached that period of life known as a certain age; she dwelt in the enjoyment of single blessedness, sold confectionery, sweetmeats, and valentines, and added to her income by lending out works of fiction to the

public. But not only did she administer to the physical and mental wants of her customers by her confections and novels, but likewise was she ever ready to entertain them with the freshest news or the latest edition of provincial gossip.

Her shop, small and cosy, wore an air of sociability becoming a library. A strip of cocoa-nut matting outside the counter, and a rug laid down before a fire-grate gay with coloured tissue-paper in summer, ruddy with smouldering wood in winter, gave an air of gentility to the shrine of fiction.

"An' it's glad t' see you I am, Misther Casey," said the village librarian.

"An' it's the same with meself, sure enough," responded the gallant corporal, "but it's great news I have t' tell you, and you're the first as will hear it from me mouth."

"What is it, at all?" she asked, her curiosity excited.

"It's about Masther Maurice, he's coming back in a couple o' weeks, plaze God."

"It's rejoiced I am to hear it; sure he was the best customer I had for the library. But is it true he's coming?"

"Sure his honour had a letter this mornin' from the young masther, an' me heart's as light as a feather ever since," replied the old soldier, "an' sure when he went, I thought I'd never see a bright day agin."

"Ay," put in Miss Kennedy, "but now you're as glad as if you were going to your own weddin', an' it's a long time that same is about comin' off; longer I can tell you nor is pleasin' to some o' the young girls."

The Corporal roared with laughter at this delicate flattery.

"Now, Miss Kennedy lave off and don't be hum-

buggin' me for God's sake. Sure, what girl would look at me a poor ould soldier ? ”

“ G'lang, now. You know that half o' them in the town are breakin' their hearts for you ; an' sure, if you only put on your red coat it's not only the half of 'em but the whole of 'em, would be that same way,” she said, with a pleasant smile.

“ Oh thanks be to God, d'ye hear her anyhow,” he said, rocking himself to and fro with renewed laughter, “ you bates all, Miss Kennedy.”

“ Whisht, Mr. Casey, you're in love.”

“ I feel me heart as light to-day as if I was,” he said. “ Poor Masther Maurice. I must go an' tell Misther Purcell, sure it's he'll be glad o' the news too.” And away he went on his joyful mission.

Early in August Sir Lawrence arrived at Usher Park House. A couple of carriages, some thoroughbred horses, half-dozen grooms with a retinue of coachmen and domestic servants headed by Monsieur Gravie, had preceded him ; their entrance into the town being regarded with an interest second only to that occasionally awakened by a circus procession.

Monsieur Gravie had borne the staring and sensation consequent on their arrival with a grace becoming his great reputation. The worthy chef had, when Sir Lawrence's intention was first announced to him, looked upon his impending visit to Ireland as he might regard transportation.

In that small but unhappy island his art would not be appreciated, for he had heard the inhabitants cared more for politics than dinners ; preferring their enemies' blood to the most delicate soup, relishing sedition more than ortolans. Moreover, there was small chance of his gaining the long-coveted honour of knighthood whilst there ; but for this he must tarry. Being a philosopher he reflected all things in life worth obtaining must be awaited.

Sir Lawrence accompanied by his secretary, arrived one evening and drove in an open carriage from the nearest station to Grantsborough, giving the good people of the town an opportunity of seeing and saluting him as he passed.

Maurice had on the first night of his arrival visited his father, who received him in a tranquil, unemotional way, and quietly noted the change which so short a time had made in his appearance. Maurice had grown tall, his figure had begun to lose its angularity, his manners had an air of easy grace and confidence imparted to them by the influences of those with whom he had associated.

"I think you did right, after all, in leaving us," said his father. "For a young man, there is nothing like mixing with the world."

"I find I have always been right in my instincts," he answered briefly.

When the old Corporal met him he held out both his hands in silence and wrung them heartily, then suddenly disappeared into the kitchen, where he remained a considerable time.

Just as Maurice had pictured to himself the morning on which he had left Grantsborough, all things had changed and become strange to him, though all things remained the same as he had left them. He wondered at this, forgetting the alteration was in himself, not in the persons or places to which he had returned. Would Madge, he wondered, be changed likewise? Somehow he shrank from meeting her.

Yet on the second morning after his arrival he strode along the once familiar path leading to the Rectory. He thought of the last night he had walked this roadway with her, the night when he had said good-bye under the silent stars.

It was little more than two months since, and yet

how long it seemed : so much had occurred in his life meanwhile, so many experiences had been crowded into his days, so different a view of all things had this short acquaintance with the world given him.

He felt he had risen above the mental mark that once placed him on a level with Madge, and was prepared to find in her, as he had found in others, that nameless difference he realised without understanding. By his absence he had grown out of her influence which unconsciously to either had coloured his life ; he had made friends with other women whose thoughts had altered the current of his mind.

His eyes were bent on the ground as he walked, but suddenly raising them he saw the object of his thoughts a little way before him, advancing in his direction. She was so near he could hear her utter an exclamation of surprise and joy, then both hastened their steps, and were shaking hands in another second.

"Oh, Maurice," she said calling him by his Christian name for the first time for years. Her cheeks were covered with blushes, her eyes sparkled with joy.

"I was about to call on your father and mother—how are they, and how are you?" his voice was cold, his manner reserved.

"Quite well, thank-you," she answered, and there ensued an awkward pause.

But she could not bear this ; she had looked forward to this meeting with delight, had thought of it night and day, pictured the expression of his face, imagined the words he would speak, and now all was different ; she could endure it no longer and with tears in her voice burst out :

"Oh, I am so glad—so glad to see you again. And you are much improved!"

He could not feel hardened at the little cry which broke from her heart, full of joy at this meeting, and he mentally reproached himself with coldness and ingratitude that he had not met her with feelings like her own.

"How good of you," he said, prompted by a sudden impulse of kindness that thawed the frigidness of his manner in an instant, "to have written to me."

"Good of me," she repeated, as if the words had fallen on her ears like music she longed to hear again. "Did my letters give you pleasure?"

Her dark eyes were raised to his, the warm colour deepened on her olive cheeks, her rosy lips parted with a smile childlike in its innocence. She had never looked so charming, and he, who was acutely sensitive to beauty, looked into her face with a sudden delight before whose expression her lids drooped. Then a little thrill of pure happiness passed through her fluttering heart, and stirred some depths of feelings within her that brought glad tears to her eyes.

All his coldness, his habitual caution, had now quite melted, and as he took her arm and passed it within his own, he answered her question according to his present feelings.

"Nothing in my new life gave me such pleasure as to hear from you; one line of yours would have recompensed me for all the trouble the world could give."

"Oh, Maurice!" she exclaimed as if his words had brought her more happiness than she could bear.

"Madge," he replied carried completely away by the feelings now possessing him, careless of the

future so that he might uninterruptedly enjoy the present, "you are the dearest girl in all the world."

As he spoke he bent down and touched her lips with his.

Suddenly it seemed to her as if the earth was changed and glorified by mystic light that rose within her soul and steeped her from head to foot in the glory of its effulgence. She was unconscious of all things, save that she was happy beyond all happiness she had dreamed of or imagined; she was wholly indifferent to all things else save this love that had suddenly taken the citadel of her heart by storm.

Summer or winter spring or autumn might come and change the face of Nature, nations might rise and fall, devastations might sweep vast continents, but whilst this love remained all things would continue the same to her, ay, even time itself would be powerless to rob her of boundless joy.

They were both too happy to go within doors; the air was bright with August sunshine, the fields full of naked gold, the day fragrant with odours of blossoming wild flowers hidden in hedges by the roadside, and sweet with songs of birds warbling in sheltering woods.

So they strayed into the Rectory garden and walked once more under trees, heavy with mellow fruit, and up and down the pathways bordered by strawberries hiding their ripeness among thick clusters of green leaves.

All Nature was happy, no clouds were in the sky, night was far ahead, and the world seemed young once more.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CORPORAL IS HAPPY.

SIR LAWRENCE being settled at Usher Park House, one of his first visitors was Dr. Fowler. The vivacious Misses Lawlor watched him slowly toiling up the hill, wearing his frock coat and tall hat, two articles of his Sunday wardrobe.

The little man stayed more than an hour with the baronet, and that evening repeated, to the credulous and envious bank clerks assembled in the hotel billiard-room, a conversation of a remarkably familiar and confidential character supposed to have taken place between himself and Sir Lawrence, ending with the words, "My dear boy, whilst you call and see me I am certain not to feel Grantsborough dull."

he rector had likewise called on the baronet, and subsequently the curate, and one or two other inhabitants, amongst whom were Richard Purcell.

Sir Lawrence, who liked the society of clever men, and remembered meeting the American author, received him with evident pleasure.

"An oasis in the desert," he remarked, "my dear sir, who would have thought of finding you here."

Purcell explained how his footsteps had been guided to Grantsborough.

"Then we are neighbours," said the baronet; adding with a fine sense of courtesy, "I consider my visit made in the most favourable time."

Purcell bowed.

"I have been here since May," he said, "and I think Grantsborough one of the most charmingly situated towns I have ever seen. I shall be sorry indeed to leave."

"Pray don't speak of parting when we have only met," said Sir Lawrence.

"You are very kind," replied Purcell, "but pray remember 'men must work;' and I feel there is no place I can toil so well as in a great city, especially London."

"Ah, I plainly see," said the baronet, with a smile and a shake of his head; "Arcadia has lost its charm for the children of this century."

The first visit Sir Lawrence paid was to his old friend Ulic Fitzmaurice. The baronet was to lunch at the cottage. Notice of his advent being given the previous day by Maurice, great preparations were made by the Corporal for the event.

On hearing the news, he bustled into the town taking all the money remaining in the domestic coffers with him, and in an hour's time returned with a mysterious parcel tied in a coloured pocket-handkerchief. This contained a pair of chickens, a bottle of sherry, some biscuits, a dress coat he had borrowed from one of the waiters at the hotel, and a cambric tie intended for his personal adornment.

Moreover he had got shaved, a piece of extravagance he was never before guilty of perpetrating in the middle of the week, and had provided himself with a bottle of oil destined to add the crowning touch in more senses than one to his toilet.

For the remainder of the day he was busy. He hammered a second hinge on the garden door it

had wanted for a month previous; raked the path leading to the house, and relieved the windows from coatings of dirt and colonies of spiders that had long obscured the light of day.

Inside the house his activity was not less great. He scrubbed the floors, brightened the sitting-room grate, polished the furniture, and banished the dogs from the house with many violent threats and muttered execrations. Next morning he was up betimes giving the finishing touches to his labours; by midday all was completed to his satisfaction, so that when Sir Lawrence arrived in a carriage as big as a stage coach, with servants in the well-known bright chocolate liveries mounted on the box, the Corporal felt as if the proudest moment of his life, long to be remembered, frequently to be mentioned, had at last arrived.

As the baronet descended from his carriage, the Corporal flung back the garden door, stood to order, and gave him a military salute, an exact—he afterwards declared on more than one occasion—reproduction of that he had once given the Duke of Cambridge.

Maurice, who had caught a glimpse of him as they drove up, was surprised and pleased at the appearance he presented. Instead of the usual sleeved waistcoat and cap, the Corporal was in a dress coat a couple of sizes too big for him, his hair was brushed and oiled until it glittered in the sun, his check-shirt had given place to spotless linen.

Ulic Fitzmaurice, dressed in his foreign-looking, much worn frock coat, with fur collar and cuffs, received his visitor with a mixture of grace, friendliness and simplicity, but without the slightest shade of embarrassment at his surroundings. Sir Lawrence was delighted at the meeting, and his pleasure rose to vivacity.

The appearance of the two men presented a striking contrast. Ulic Fitzmaurice was pale and worn, his thin grey hair, figure shrunken and stooped, and general air of gravity and depression betrayed the passage of time; whilst the baronet's bright wig, dyed moustache, upright form, wreathed smiles, and general effort at juvenility made him seem a grotesque figure of age masking in youth.

He spoke much, principally of himself, skilfully steered clear of past reminiscences that might recall his friend's altered circumstances, and told a couple of amusing anecdotes of men whom they had known a quarter of a century ago.

After half-an-hour's conversation, the Corporal entered the room noiselessly, laid a cloth for luncheon, and then served the roast fowls with some show of ceremony. Half-a-dozen bottles stood prominently in view on the old piano, five being filled with water, the sixth with good old sherry; this he uncorked with great deliberation, and placed on the table.

Sir Lawrence declared he had an appetite, nay, he might say he was quite hungry, and the prospect of luncheon was most agreeable; so he seated himself at the table with dainty grace, and the Corporal, standing behind his chair, watched him pick the breast of a fowl, swallow three crumbs of bread and drink a glass and a half of sherry with an appearance of enjoyment.

Before the baronet departed he said to Ulic Fitzmaurice: "Come and take your mutton with me some day—any hour you please, and I will send the brougham for you."

The Corporal could scarcely refrain from expressing his pleasure, and nodded sympathetically to his master over the baronet's head by way of intimating his full approval of the scheme.

Ulic Fitzmaurice excused himself on the plea of his health.

"I never go out now," he said, "My health is so uncertain, it makes me almost a recluse."

Nothing Sir Lawrence could urge had power of altering his resolution. But presently the baronet remembered that his host might at least be able to drive with him on some of these warm mid-days.

To this the old man readily consented, and Sir Lawrence expressed the delight it would give him to drive with his old friend once more. After an hour's visit, the baronet parted with many protestations of friendship worked into graceful phrases, and smiles which took the Corporal's heart by storm.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT USHER PARK HOUSE.

"I THINK," said Sir Lawrence to Maurice one morning, whilst yet trifling with his breakfast, "I think I must give a dinner. Will you just take down the names of those I shall ask, and write the invitations after?"

"What day shall you fix on?"

"Well, here people don't require a long notice. I suppose they seldom dine out?"

"Some of them never."

"Dear me, that must seem rather monotonous. Let me see whom I shall ask. I wish I could induce your father to come, but I suppose it's no use trying," he added.

"I am afraid not. I don't think he is equal to it now," Maurice answered.

"Dear me, and we are both about the same age."

"It is not age, but constitution that makes the difference, and yours is remarkably healthy," said the secretary, diplomatically.

"Yes, I believe you are right. I am remarkably healthy indeed and—and I really feel quite young."

"Some one has said a man is always as young as he feels, a woman as young as she looks."

"A very sensible remark, as much so indeed as ever I heard. Do you remember who made it. Some clever man, no doubt; I should like to read his works, for I take it for granted a man capable of such an expression has written, and his writings must be worth reading."

"I don't remember," said the secretary.

"Fitzmaurice you should have a good memory; youth has little to remember, forgetfulness is merely a habit, and a bad habit, easily acquired and not readily discarded, I can tell you."

Maurice looked out of the window and made no reply.

"Well, about these names," he continued. "I shall ask Purcell, he talks well and will be a relief. Strange, isn't it, how few people talk well? Conversation is a lost art. By the way, ask his aunts—I called on them the other day—very amiable gentlewomen they are, and I like the appearance of women in a room; no matter how plain, they are always the handsomest ornamentation an apartment can have; then the rector and his wife."

"And Miss Rochford?"

"She is merely a child, I think."

"She is quite grown up."

"Then ask her by all means. Invite the doctor also, the consideration he entertains of himself is amusing; he diverts me; and ask the Millfords, he is the lord-lieutenant of the county, he talks a good

deal and his voice will drown the sounds of knives and the jingle of glasses so horribly suggestive of dining being a vulgar gratification instead of an art. Mrs. Millford and her two daughters are charming and piquant, ask them all. I think that will be enough; one cannot dine properly and attend to a large number of guests, besides I can ask some others for another night, and that will be a variety."

On the evening of the dinner-party Sir Lawrence was in good spirits. Those asked accepted his invitation, except Miss Dailey, who having a cold was obliged to decline. Aunt Allie however came with her nephew in a covered car hired from the hotel, and was enraptured with Sir Lawrence's attentions.

At dinner Mrs. Rochford sat on the baronet's right. The rector's wife was an Englishwoman, self-contained and cold in manner, inanimate and severe in expression. A long residence in Ireland had failed to place her in sympathy with her surroundings, or in accord with her neighbours whom she secretly distrusted and openly regarded as a race inferior to her own. Her interests yet lay in her native land to which her thoughts invariably turned, and she listened with pleasure to items of news concerning London and its famous people, narrated by Sir Lawrence. The rector was a man endowed with a genial temper and a kindly face framed in bushy whiskers and a beard fast turning grey. In his gentle dark eyes rested a pre-occupied look as if the inward life was more to him than outward surroundings. A scholar and an archæologist, his thoughts dwelt far more on mediæval tombs, Hebrew transcriptions, and the mystery of round towers, than on the souls of the flock entrusted to his spiritual charge.

Maurice sat between the Misses Millford, who

inherited their father's conversational powers: both asked him questions at the same instant, and without giving him time to reply continued a fire of remarks, one voice pausing now and then, but ultimately overtaking the other like a pleasant sounding if nonsensical duet.

Their father talked to Aunt Allie, and Purcell to his great delight sat beside Madge Rochford, who seemed during dinner not a little absent-minded, whilst Dr. Fowler ventilated his opinions concerning the manner in which the streets of Grantsborough should be lighted, to the inattentive ear of the lord-lieutenant of the county.

Everyone appeared happy.

Sir Lawrence's manner was the embodiment of an exquisite politeness, never obtrusive, ever felt, the refinement of attention, the flower of courtesy.

Monsieur Gravie had that morning an inspiration which enabled him to invent an omelet that added fresh glory to an already brilliant fame; the wines had lain in the cellar of Usher Park House since the days of the Union.

The ladies having retired, the men drew closer together; the host lying back in his chair with a sigh of unmixed delight, lighted a scented cigarette; his guests helped themselves to Havannas provided for their use.

"I'm told," said the lord-lieutenant, exhaling a cloud of smoke into Sir Lawrence's face which made him wink and cough, "I'm told you have had some trouble with the Ballyrogan people; a difficult lot to manage, I expect."

"On the contrary, I found them most reasonable, because I treated them with consideration.

"Humph," said Mr. Millford, who for a couple of years had been engaged in a dispute with his tenants.

"I renewed their leases, slightly raising the rent; they saw the justice of this and were satisfied."

"The country is in a bad state," said Mr. Millford, "this land agitation is disgraceful."

"I think," Purcell quietly observed, "Ireland is a nation blessed with the grand inherent trait of unrest, which is and ever has been the herald of progress; placid contentment in a country means death to advancement."

Mr. Millford laid down his cigar, and stared at him in speechless astonishment.

"There is much in what you say," said the host delighted at having Millford's feelings outraged; it added zest to the enjoyment of his dinner.

"The cause of Ireland's unrest at this moment," continued Purcell unheeding the lord-lieutenant's stare, "is dissatisfaction with her condition, and England cannot escape a certain responsibility for the present state of the Irish people, on account of her treatment of them in the past. The action of yesterday invariably colours the events of to-day."

"Very true," said Sir Lawrence, pleasantly sipping his eighty-year-old port; "very true indeed."

"Across the channel they harp on the story of Irish national discontent and distress, satisfied with the accusation, yet unwilling to ascertain its cause in the records of past conduct," continued Purcell.

"I think, my dear sir," said the rector mildly, "the disturbance of the people is due to their Celtic origin. The Celts have been always restless, and change of climate has as little effect upon a race, if it remains unmixed, as the sun has in permanently altering the complexion; under the surface of civilisation and education, the Celt remains always the same."

"Then you consider," said Sir Lawrence, with a smile, "they cannot help agitating?"

"No more than they can change the cast of their features. It is the nature of the Celt to agitate, and he has acted true to his instincts for centuries, whether the object of his discontent was an unfriendly clan or a hated Saxon."

Mr. Millford, who had lain back in his chair in a state of bewilderment, not knowing what wild theory he might next hear discussed, roused himself to remark:

"I suppose no one here doubts that Englishmen at the present day are lovers of justice."

"No," said Purcell, "but I fear they only exercise it where they themselves are concerned."

Mr. Millford moved uneasily, and Sir Lawrence, fearing his feelings were outraged by this last thrust remarked:

"I remember O'Connell said Ireland was the most justice loving country in the world."

"And do crimes committed daily show a love of justice?" asked the lord-lieutenant.

"They don't," replied Purcell; "though I believe they are blindly perpetrated in her name; were they wrought through any other motive, Irishmen would be the first to shrink from them."

"Yet," said Sir Lawrence, anxious the conversation should not take a serious turn, "when O'Connell made that assertion, his 'police,' as he called the mob which invariably accompanied him through the streets of Dublin, to show their fine sense of justice, knocked the hats off the heads of all who refused to uncover whilst he passed, and sometimes treated them roughly, as was the case with my old friend, Stuart Trench."

"I cannot understand why the people don't emigrate, if dissatisfied," said Mr. Millford.

"Ah, the Celtic nature is again responsible for that," said the rector. "The Celt is denied the self-confidence with which the Saxon is endowed. Why does an Irishman passionately cling to a cabin oftentimes unfit to shelter animals, and commit murder for sake of a few acres, on which he laboured *as hard as a beast of burden*, that he might squeeze enough from it to pay an exorbitant rent to his landlord, and gain a miserable subsistence for himself and his family? He knows that in Canada for one third the labour he could live in independence and comparative ease, that in Australia or New Zealand there are thousands of acres requiring tillage, from which he could reap a harvest sufficient to keep himself and his family in a manner that would seem luxurious beside his present drudgery; but why doesn't he go there?"

"Because," said Purcell, "he naturally clings to the home that has been his and his father's before him—the scene of his exertions, the spot associated with the few joys that fall to his lot."

"Not at all my dear sir," replied the rector in his mellow voice, "though he himself may sometimes mistakingly think such is his reason. It is because he has not the self-confidence or courage to venture abroad. He prefers wretchedness at home to seeking comfort in a land of which he knows nothing; so long as he has enough to keep body and soul together for to-day, he is satisfied to struggle in hope that chance or Providence will send him something better to-morrow; he prefers dreaming of the past to acting in the present."

"That is true," said Dr. Fowler, who really knew nothing about the subject, but was anxious to speak.

"Now on the other hand," continued Mr. Rochford, "the Saxon, a much duller fellow, full of self-esteem and self-confidence, does not care twopence for his farm unless it makes money. The moment it fails to pay, he flings it up without a word of sentimental complaint, and starts for a fresh country, where he hopes for better success. He goes to Canada or New Zealand without ventilating the wrongs which compel him to leave a few unprofitable acres, minds sheep in the bush, or fells trees in the Canadian forests, works hard, loves labour for the money it brings, becomes one of the people in habits and politics, and cares little if he never sees the mother country again."

"Really, this is new to me," said Mr. Millford, "and I must say your argument is striking—very striking indeed, 'pon my word."

"An idea has occurred to me," said Sir Lawrence.

"What is that?" said the lord-lieutenant, leaning forward, expecting to hear some opinion yet more startling.

"That we are scarcely behaving with the chivalry characteristic of Irishmen towards the fairer sex, in remaining away from them so long."

"And Rochford," he said, taking the rector's arm and drawing him a little aside when they stood up, "what a charming girl your daughter is. I think I have never seen a more lovely woman in my life."

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER DINNER.

THE drawing-room at Usher Park House was a large lofty apartment; the windows high and wide, were curtained with deep crimson damask, the ceiling richly carved, and in the corners strips of mirror, ran from floor to ceiling, reflecting clusters of tapers in massive sconces resting against the walls.

A great square piano stood at the right hand side of the room, a wedding present to Lady Usher, and but seldom touched since her death. A full-length portrait of the famous Sir Hugh Usher who figured in the Court of George the First, painted by Godfrey Kneller, hung at one end of the apartment, at the other a Holy Family, considered a genuine Alessandro Bonvicino.

Beneath this picture on a great settee of deep red satin, Aunt Allie and Madge were sitting when Sir Lawrence entered, he approached them at once.

Aunt Allie smiled, swept her silken skirts aside, and made room for him.

"I hope you purpose staying a little while with us Sir Lawrence," she said, "it seems quite an age since you were here before."

The baronet bowed.

"I must admit I have been a sad truant," he replied, touching the narrow watered ribbon of his eye-glass with his thin white fingers covered with handsome rings; "but I never knew how much I lost by my absence until to-night;" he

glanced first at the elder lady, and then let his gaze rest on Madge for a second.

She looked at him with her fearless eyes and smiled; his words had no deeper meaning for her than those of a passing compliment.

"Then," said Aunt Allie, "I hope you will not be a bird of passage but take refuge with us a little while."

He noticed Madge waited for his reply with some concern, and felt quite pleased by the interest he believed he had awakened in her, ignorant that she thought of his movements only so far as they were concerned with those of Maurice.

"I will," he replied, "if only you ladies give me the enjoyment of your society from time to time."

This intimation of remaining was delightful to Madge, whose face at once reflected her mind; the baronet caught the expression and felt not only pleased but gratified.

"I take it for granted, Miss Rochford," he said, addressing her, "you are musical."

"Yes, she sings charmingly," Aunt Allie answered for her.

"I thought so."

"And then Sir Lawrence, she never requires the music of a song once learned."

"Ah," said the baronet, "I have always found the true musician has no need of printed notes, harmony dwells in the heart."

"You are very good, Sir Lawrence," Madge answered blushing a little.

"And you will sing?" he asked.

"Yes, and you shall choose the song," she replied, anxious to give him pleasure, for had he not been Maurice's best friend and did he not deserve her deepest gratitude?

"You are more than kind," he said, smiling, "and, since you are good enough to give me my choice, I will ask you to sing one of Moore's songs."

"They are always charming," said Aunt Allie.

"I remember quite well," said the baronet, "Moore used to come into London drawing-rooms with a little harp under his coat, the strings of which he touched now and then as he sang; his voice was very mellow and full of feeling; when I met him I was a very young man, of course."

"Of course," answered Aunt Allie.

"Lady Blessington used to say he sang like a nightingale," said Sir Lawrence.

"How charming he must have been," said Madge.

"Very—in a drawing-room; in private life it was said he bit his nails and wore gloves to keep his hands white; but I want to hear the nightingale who has promised to sing for me. Allow me, Miss Rochford, to lead you to the piano."

"I shall sing 'Believe me, if all,'" she said.

The instrument had been tuned but a few days before Sir Lawrence's arrival; its tone was full and rich, but not richer nor fuller than Madge Rochford's notes.

There are voices whose music fills the heart before the ear has fully caught the sound, hers was such.

When she rose from the piano, the silence of appreciation reigned in the room, broken eventually by Dr. Fowler saying:

"Certainly very pretty; 'pon ma word!"

Purcell looked at him and smiled.

"Elizabeth Barrett Browning tells us," he remarked, "she once heard a young lady say the last part of Homer was certainly very pretty," and he walked away to the other end of the room.

This song had touched emotions hidden in his nature of whose existence he was scarcely conscious before ; her voice, at once sweet, fresh, and plaintive, stirred the deepest, tenderest memories of his heart. He had never been moved like this, and now he knew not whether he was more sad or glad.

One of the Miss Millfords shortly after sang an Italian aria at Sir Lawrence's request, and then the baronet sought the corner where Mrs. Millford and Mrs. Rochford sat, and delighted both matrons with some happily-timed compliments.

Maurice approached Madge for the first time during the evening.

"How do you like Sir Lawrence? I saw you speaking to him before you sang."

"Yes, just for a moment. I like him much, he is agreeable and courteous, and—and——"

"And what?" he asked.

"And I like him because he has been your friend," she answered, looking at him with the brightness of sunshine in her face.

Purcell, who had been crossing the room to speak to her, noted that glance, hesitated, and turned back.

"Have I but caught a sight of Heaven to remind me how miserable is earth?" he said to himself. "I shall lose my manhood, if I don't return, and let my feelings find an outlet in work; and yet—and yet I cannot leave her. God never made such a woman before. That I had never seen her. And yet, not to have met her would have been to have lost a happiness worth its weight of misery."

Whilst these thoughts passed through his mind, the lord-lieutenant, standing on the hearth-rug and speaking to the rector, eyed him severely.

"May I ask who is that man?" he said, indicating Purcell by a nod of his head, and looking

at him, whilst he knitted his red eye-brows, and pulled his moustache first on one side and then on the other.

"That is Mr. Richard Purcell, a friend of mine host's," replied the rector, mildly.

"An Irishman?"

"No, an American."

"Dear me, that accounts for his principles. I never heard such theories as those he ventilated while ago. A dangerous man, a very dangerous man, I must say, and not one whom I should have expected to meet here; but Sir Lawrence was always a little odd!"

The wrathful man's daughters were talking to the doctor, who to-night seemed smaller of stature and rounder of person than ever.

He had shown his appreciation of the baronet's excellent port in a persistent and practical manner, and his face was in consequence redder and more pugnacious in expression than usual.

"Yes, 'pon ma word, Miss Millford," he said to the elder of the young ladies, whose hair, eyes, and general complexion were straw coloured. "Yes, 'pon ma word, some of your notes remind me of Patti."

The doctor ended his words with a smile that might more appropriately be termed a grin.

"Oh! Dr. Fowler," said the young lady, whom Nature had gifted with a shrieking voice.

She heard the doctor's words with a flattered air, and feeling satisfied that they pleased, did not doubt their veracity.

"I heard her repeatedly when I was in London, at the opera," continued the medical man.

"How fortunate."

This a duet from both the sisters, "We would give anything to hear her."

"Yes," said the doctor preparing to astonish them still more, "and I was afterwards introduced to her."

His nearest approach to the queen of song had been the front row of Covent Garden Theatre gallery, but he was gifted with the imagination and possessed the boastfulness that never hesitates to sacrifice truth, so common to his countrymen.

His words had the effect desired, both ladies leaned back and stared at him with an expression of awe he considered quite becoming.

"Yes," he continued emboldened by his success to a further effort of imagination. "Lady Arthur Fields introduced me to her one night after supper: she is a magnificent woman, and her photographs scarcely do her justice," he added with an air of deep consideration and mental absorption, as if passing them in review before his mental gaze.

"How lovely she must be" said Miss Millwood.

"Oh, quite charming, I assure you, but her manner is even more fascinating, 'pon ma word, it really is now," and he gave a little sigh and pursed up his lips in a comical way, meant to express sentiment generally, and the remembrance of some tender moments in particular.

"Then she is not vile-tempered, as the society papers say?"

"Vile-tempered," he replied, indignantly. "In private life she is the most amiable of women, she is, 'pon ma word," he continued, wishing to convey the idea of his intimate knowledge of her, "and it's quite scandalous what the society papers do be saying. It is, 'pon ma word;" he straightened himself and pulled down his waistcoat with an outraged jerk, as if he too had suffered from their vileness.

"I suppose you met a number of distinguished people when in London."

"Yes," he said, now smiling most affably. "I may say I met the heads of the people, especially in literary and art circles. Miss Braddon I knew very well, I played a game of billiards with William Black, and I dined one day with Sir John Millais, it was a very agreeable stay."

"It must have been a pleasant time," said the young lady of straw-coloured aspect, who was rather innocent as to the ways of the world, and believed all she heard.

"Yes, it was a change from Grantsborough," he answered, in a tone expressive of pity for those who had not his experiences. "Meeting such persons gives you an interest in their works, and then," he added, with an air of patronage excessively droll, "they are a good-hearted set as a rule, they are indeed, 'pon ma word."

When the guests departed, Sir Lawrence walked with each group to the door, and with his most gracious manner and his happiest smile thanked them for the favour they had done him.

The doctor, who was last to leave, caught the baronet's hand in a farewell grasp, and with a friendship begotten of wine and of flattered vanity, wrung it with an energy that made the rings sink into the baronet's fingers, causing him an acute torture, which he bore with an amiability worthy of a martyr.

When quite alone, and seated in the cosy little study opening from his bed-room, some strange thoughts passed through the baronet's mind that night. He had donned his dressing-gown, and seated himself in an easy-chair before a table on which rested a shaded lamp, a bottle of pale sherry, a box of cigarettes, a magazine, and it must be confessed a pair of spectacles.

Sir Lawrence crossed his legs, and joined the tips

of his fingers. His eyes rested on the luminous figures that hand-in-hand, bound with ropes of roses, danced round the lamp shade in eternal gaiety ; but his thoughts were centred on himself and his future.

His face, now no one was present to observe him, looked haggard and old ; his forehead terribly wrinkled, and the skin of his neck scraggy. Occasionally he smiled, when the effect was like a wintry ray of sunshine falling on a withered flower.

"One cannot eat his pudding and have it," he said rousing himself from his reverie with a sigh ; "and so I cannot have my youth. If I were only thirty years younger—only thirty—what a difference it would make."

He rose from his chair, passed into his bed-room, went over to the dressing-table, where a pair of candles burned at either side of the mirror, and studied his reflection for some minutes.

"Not so old-looking after all," he said, turning away from the glass ; "and not so bad-looking either. I was always a favourite with the fair sex, and an advantage a man has in his youth seldom leaves him in his age ; then my spirit is much younger than that of many men only half my years ; and there is a great deal in that—a very great deal indeed," he said, reflectively.

"Ah !" he said at last, in answer to his meditations, "she is a charming girl ; I would give half I possess to be her equal in years."

CHAPTER XX.

WOULD SHE BUT LOVE ME!

IN the course of the following week, Sir Lawrence found it necessary on more than one occasion to see the rector, and consult him on some trifling matters having connection with his sacred charge, in which the baronet seemed to have developed a sudden interest, as justly became his position.

Mr. Rochford was somewhat surprised by this concern now for the first time exhibited in the schools, the hospital, and other institutions; and, on the other hand, Sir Lawrence was astonished at how little the rector knew concerning them, for Mr. Rochford left all such matters to the consideration of his curate.

Sir Lawrence's tact therefore showed him that to continue his interest in this direction would prove injudicious on his part, inasmuch as it would not prove agreeable to the pastor of souls.

On the various occasions of his visits he had met Mrs. and Miss Rochford, and was as pleased with their delicate attentions as they were gratified by his courtesy. One day he had lunched with them, had sat next the rector's fair daughter, had spoken to her during the meal, had looked at and admired her paintings on china afterwards shown him, and had gone away with her words of no particular import, ringing in his ears, and the memory of her bright face uppermost in his mind.

Every time he beheld her, his infatuation increased; never had he seen a countenance which impressed

him in like manner, her charming freshness, and natural grace completed the fascination she had first exercised; he soon felt that to see her was necessary to the enjoyment of his life.

"Why not?" he asked himself. She was handsome, and all his existence he had delighted in things of beauty; elegance, grace, symmetry of form, harmony of colour, phrases of melody were to him subtle delights; he was sensitive to all things enjoyable in Nature and art, but this girl, who combined many charms, by her mere presence afforded him more pleasure than he had known in women's society before.

"Men bow down and worship the marble Canova chiselled, the canvas Rubens warmed to life," he said, "but what loveliness can compare with Nature when she aims at beauty?"

And so days and weeks passed, and this new dream remained with him and filled his life. It was noticed an almost feverish restlessness seized him, which he seemed powerless to allay.

He no longer cared to study, listened with unconcealed abstraction when Fitzmaurice read; rose earlier than was his wont in the morning, then found the hours went by slowly, and he had no interests to occupy him. If he drove he was tired; if he remained indoors he suffered from *ennui*; before day was done he longed for night, and when night had come he wished it were morning.

Flowers were sent almost daily to the rectory, from the hothouses and gardens, varied continually by offerings of fruit and game.

During this period the baronet's valet had an uneasy time. Sir Lawrence insisted on him performing wonders which were not in mortal to accomplish; it was impossible even for this clever artist to erase wrinkles and signs time had

ungenerously left on the baronet's face, though not quite beyond his reach to give the cheeks a tint that might have successfully vied with youth in its appearance of vigor and freshness.

Sir Lawrence wore his juvenile wig with an air of greater spruceness than he had hitherto ventured to adopt, his moustache assumed a deeper tint of brown, and his carriage became more airy and graceful than of yore.

In order that he might continue his visits to the rectory with some reasonable pretence, it was necessary—now the rector had not betrayed concern in philanthropic schemes—he should hit upon some new object of interest to Mr. Rochford, on which he might ask his opinions from time to time ; his only remedy, therefore, was to become absorbed in archæology, the rector's favourite study.

It was a happy idea, the subject seemed interminable, and the rector's delight in explaining curious plates, photographs of unsightly stones, portions of armour battered out of shape, odd ornaments and pieces of arms, was amazing.

One day Sir Lawrence called and drove him and his family to the church, where the rector pointed out the beauties of a Norman arch, which the baronet otherwise would never have discovered.

On another occasion the same brief journey was repeated to see ancient tombstones lying in the churchyard, which the rector pronounced matchless. Sir Lawrence thanked heaven they were.

In the course of his descriptions this day, Mr. Rochford referred to an ancient monument lying in the ruined abbey of Merfont, about eight miles distant. This Sir Lawrence at once declared himself anxious to see, indeed his interest in the stone became so great that he proposed driving the whole party to the abbey next day but one; to which suggestion Mrs.

Rochford consented, if Sir Lawrence would first promise to lunch with them before starting.

The baronet expressed himself delighted at the proposal.

The day fixed for the visit proved most agreeable. It was late in September, and the air was bracing without being cold; the sun shone brightly, lighting up the rich brown and red gold of the woods by which they passed, and gleaming here and there on the river winding below the road, glimpses of which could be caught now and then where branches parted.

The gorse was bright with yellow blossoms, purple heather clad the sides of distant mountains, over which shifting lights and shadows played.

The baronet and the rector sat with their backs to the horses, Sir Lawrence facing Madge, whose clear olive cheeks were just coloured by a rosy tint where the autumn breeze had touched her.

Merfont Abbey was a picturesque ruin around which an impressive air of silence, grandeur and melancholy clung, its grey walls were covered with ivy in whose shelter generations of birds made their homes.

Sir Lawrence walked by the side of Madge up the grass-grown path leading from the road to the abbey.

A few locks of her hair hung over her forehead, and her dark eyes sparkled with pleasure and excitement.

"You don't feel tired, I hope," the baronet said, looking into her face.

"Tired? oh, no! I have enjoyed the drive immensely; the day is delightful; do you know, I prefer autumn of all seasons?"

"You do? I should have imagined you liked spring, when the earth is fresh and bright, it

is the very symbol of youth?" he said almost sadly.

"Yes, but youth is not always pleasant," she replied.

He looked at her quickly, but could read no meaning which he might appropriate to himself in her words.

"These sober tints, deep yellows and browns of the fields, red and gold of the trees, crimson sunsets closing the shortening days, I like all these things which autumn alone gives."

"You are an artist, Miss Rochford."

"If I were," she said with a little laugh, "I would paint a picture of the abbey."

They entered by a low stone arch, the rector leading the way to the lady-chapel, where the famous monument lay which they had come to see. It was raised a few feet from the ground, and had a rough representation of the crucifixion carved on its surface.

"Who can tell who lies beneath this?" said Madge, wondering if it were someone who had died young, some one who had loved as she now loved, and marvelling if the poor buried heart, which had turned to dust perhaps centuries ago, had felt tremulous joys and hopes such as surged within hers.

"At the side of the figure are two hands open," said the rector, "which point to the name of the deceased; from their position I am inclined to think they are hieroglyphics."

"Indeed!" said Sir Lawrence looking at them from a distance through his gold-rimmed eyeglass.

"No sign was more used by the Egyptians and ancient Irish than the hand; when pointing upwards it was the sign armorial of our ancient kings."

"It is all a mystery," said the girl aloud, not heeding her father's words, but continuing the train of thoughts that had crossed her mind, "who can say?"

"My dear child," said the rector, with some surprise, "the Hiberno-Scythians, or ancient Irish, knew the art of picture writing, the Hunno-Scythians and Chaldeans likewise, in fact, almost all nations—even the barbarians—have used it."

"Yes," said Madge timidly.

"This is indeed remarkable," said Sir Lawrence striving to interest himself.

"It is more than remarkable, my dear sir, the carving of the hand is unique, and not seen on any other monument since the introduction of Christianity," Mr. Rochford continued proudly, as he took his handkerchief and brushed the clay and dust from the surface of the tomb.

"It is quite a picturesque place," said Mrs. Rochford, who though usually unimpressible, did not fail to be affected by the scene which the ruin, with its sacred associations and forgotten tombs, presented.

They were standing beneath one of the carved arches, facing the great eastern window, now framing an expanse of cloudless sky, azure-hued, infinite, fathomless.

Around were tombs grey with time, moss-grown, chipped and broken, and on the high walls black with age, and the sod beneath their feet, and wherever the eye rested, grass, weed, and lichen flourished in rank verdure.

A reverent silence brooded within the ruins, as if a spell hung about the place, which strongly affected them.

"It was a mitred abbey," said the rector, looking round, "founded for Cistercian monks; the abbot

sat in the House of Lords, the last was Oliver Fitzmaurice, who died shortly before its suppression; he is buried at the north end, the burial-place of the Fitzmaurice family."

"How interesting!" said Madge, "let us go and see it."

As she finished she became aware her mother had fixed a cold scrutinizing look on her, and the girl felt a sudden constraint seize her.

"The tomb is over three hundred years old," said the rector as they stood beside it, looking down on the grey stone where in high relief the image of the last abbot in his robes, crozier in hand and mitre on head, was carved. Close by were modern tombs inclosed within iron railings, rusty and overgrown with ivy.

Madge looked at the spot with some reverence, whilst her father dwelt on the beauty of the carved design round the abbot's tomb, and Sir Lawrence tapped his right shoe with his onyx-headed cane impatiently.

He had already been sufficiently reminded of mortality; death was a subject on which he never conversed, seldom thought, and never regarded as having connection with his future. He now felt depressed by sight of these tombs and traces of decay, and became anxious to leave a place that bore so many evidences of a truth he could not quite ignore. If he were but so much dust and ashes, why should he be reminded of the fact whilst yet living, and the world around him bright, and his digestion excellent. He therefore intimated to the rector he had seen quite enough of the abbey for the present, and to pacify the good man vaguely hinted they might visit the place another day.

Accordingly they were soon seated in the carriage once more, and the bracing air, combined with the

charm of Madge's face, quickly helped him to recover his happy vivaciousness.

"I hope you have enjoyed your visit, Miss Rochford?"

"Very much, it was interesting and the drive is delightful!" she replied smiling as she turned her eyes from the view of hill and wood and pasture-land lying placid in the sunshine.

He was pleased with her reply, and with an admiring eye noted the rich colouring of her face, framed by thick masses of brown hair.

She seemed the embodiment of graceful youth, health and beauty, and, as the baronet gazed at her, he sighed and once more wished he were young again. He wondered if it were possible she would consent to share her life with him, care for him, perhaps in time love him.

It was a dream of happiness which, having once taken possession of his mind, left him powerless to banish its illusions. Would she consent to marry him? He was old, but his heart and spirit were young, and he would give her all those things which women hold dear and the world prizes—riches, station, rank.

He would devote his days to pleasing her; the object of his life would be to gratify her wishes.

"The man who hesitates is lost," he said; "I will speak to her father. He is a sensible man save in his craze for archæology."

"Do you know," he remarked to Mrs. Rochford, when he had come to this determination, "my gardener tells me some wonderful chrysanthemums have come out within the last week."

"They are beautiful flowers," replied the matron.

"Oh! he is as proud as Punch of them; he was talking to me about them this morning, and I promised I would look at them. Perhaps you

and Miss Rochford would like to see them, and if you and the rector will share a lonely bachelor's lunch any day this week that suits, you will do me a favour."

"Really, Sir Lawrence," said Mrs. Rochford, "you are most kind; it will be a pleasure to us," she added.

The baronet bowed and smiled, and looked at Madge. An expression of sudden pleasure dawned in her face that gave him strange hopes.

Was it possible she loved him?

"Will you confirm your kindness by naming a convenient day?" he said.

"All days are alike here. Will to-morrow suit you dear?" Mrs. Rochford asked, turning to her husband.

"Yes," he answered mildly, "to-morrow will suit me exactly."

"Then," said Sir Lawrence, "I may expect you."

On arriving at the Rectory he saw the ladies to the door, but refusing to enter the house, tarried with Mr. Rochford. Whilst both directing their steps down the path, the baronet said:

"My dear Rochford, I am going to say something that may surprise you."

The rector looked at him wonderingly, but made no reply, and Sir Lawrence continued:

"I have taken a fancy, or rather, I—I am in love with your daughter," he said nervously, then he added: "Do you object to my proposing marriage to her?"

"God bless my soul," said the rector, stopping suddenly in the path, suspending the coloured silk pocket-handkerchief in his hand which he was about to carry to his face, and looking full at his companion.

Sir Lawrence coughed.

"There is some disparity in our years," he continued, "but Miss Rochford may overlook it, that is," he said a sudden thought striking him, which for a moment took away his breath, "if her affections are not already engaged."

"So far as I'm aware they are not."

Sir Lawrence gave a gasp of relief.

"And I have your consent to my proposal?" he asked eagerly.

"I am sensible of the honour you do me Sir Lawrence, but the matter has come upon me so suddenly I am quite taken by surprise."

"Naturally, naturally, my dear sir," answered the baronet, shaking his head and elevating his eyebrows.

"I am of course quite willing you should ask her consent, but I shall never strive to influence her decision in any way; she must please herself."

"Of course—of course," replied the baronet yet more blandly, and no more was said on the subject.

Sir Lawrence drove away glad he had broached the topic nearest his heart, and the rector, stunned and wonder-stricken, returned slowly to his house pondering on the words he had heard.

"My dear," he said, when he reached the dining-room where his wife was apparently waiting him, "something very strange has happened. Sir Lawrence has asked my consent to his proposing marriage to Madge."

"I am not surprised," said Mrs. Rochford, triumphantly. "Dear child! How delighted I am; it will be an excellent match for her."

"But the difference in their ages makes their union seem unnatural."

"Madge is a sensible girl, and will overlook such a trifle in consideration of many advantages," said Mrs. Rochford, to which the rector made no reply.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. MUNDELLA RYSTON'S LETTERS.

MEANWHILE, Fitzmarice continually corresponded with Mrs. Mundella Ryston. Her letters were to him a source of interest and pleasure. In the replies with which she favoured him, she simply reflected her thoughts on paper, and so like were they to her utterances that reading them he fancied he heard her speak the words her pages contained.

In his letters he told her of his daily life, of thoughts dwelling in his mind regarding his future, amused her by anecdotes of Sir Lawrence, pleased her by the hopes expressed for their speedy meeting, but made no mention of Miss Rochford's name.

During this time he was far from feeling at ease. The fact of his allowing himself to be carried away during the first meeting with her by feelings that no longer influenced him when removed from her presence, was a reproach under which he winced.

He had falsely given her to understand she held a place in his life, if not in direct words, by insinuations and palpable inferences he was prompted to make by emotions swaying him at the moment. He had taken a step from which it would require consummate tact to withdraw with any vestige of dignity or honour, and withdraw he must, for in his heart he had no love for the girl, though sensitive to her beauty, and the rare charm her presence cast over him.

Anything like a serious engagement between them was impossible, she must not stand in the light of his good fortune and let her shadow darken his future prospects. This was a duty which he not only owed to himself—a primary consideration—but likewise to her.

Still, if she would not see this in the same aspect as he did, how was he to extricate himself from the position in which he felt unhappily placed towards her. This was a question time must solve.

Meanwhile he avoided her presence as much as possible, and when they met was studiously reserved if not absolutely cold. But even this action failed to restore peace to his mind, and he informed Mrs. Mundella Ryston, to whom he intuitively turned for comfort, that he was restless and unhappy, without specifying the cause.

Her letter in reply said to him :

“In one sentence you charm and distress me. Why are you restless, why troubled? You are gifted, young and free, with all the world before you to conquer, with hopes and dreams and love to make your future radiant as a summer day. Is it possible that under any circumstance you would still be sensitive to the same influences of unrest ?

“This is an idea which has not struck me before, yet there is a probability of its truth. Oftentimes people wish to alter the circumstances of their lives, thinking here at last is rest, peace, happiness, but none of them are gained. The inward life remains untouched by outward change, and from birth to death there are natures that cry out, and cry in vain, ‘Let me have rest.’

“I remember when I was a child how tired I was of life; how stupid, foolish, useless it all seemed, then I drifted into girlhood, with splendid ideals, hopes, and ambitions filling my mind, but hidden

under all, buried so deep as to be almost lost, was the old restless questioning.

"Now that these ambitions, hopes, and ideals have been scattered as if by a breath, this feeling of unrest, which has never departed from me, forms part of my life, and I sometimes hope and despair in one hour. This is not, I believe, the result of circumstance, but of natural disposition, and I am not to blame, for no one can be more wise than destiny. Yet, when I think of another passing through the same experience, I am distressed beyond measure.

"It would be absurd to say conquer it, for one cannot quench the springs of one's life, as I feel I must do before I reach a goal of happiness."

Fitzmaurice dwelt on these words repeatedly. A vision of the writer rose continually before his mental sight; in some way she became associated with his dreams of the future. With her to guide him there were no heights to which he might not climb, no difficulties he might not overcome.

He was young and free, with all the world before him, as she had said, but it sometimes seemed to him as if it were useless running the race of existence; as if neither the gifts nor the honours the future might hold were worth a struggle. Ambition seemed but empty dreams.

He was scarce aware the tone of his feelings were set to the keynote struck in Mrs. Mundella Ryston's letters: her influence over him was greater than either recognised.

"We are now staying," she wrote one day, "in Sussex, at Lady Everfair's charming home. It's a delightful house, built in the centre of a pine wood. Before the great balustraded entrance a wide avenue runs perfectly straight for two miles between rows of trees; it is excessively picturesque.

"You may remember the countess, she is a wonderful woman, clever, vivacious, one of the most delightful if occasionally the most scandalous conversationalist in society. The failings of her friends and acquaintances afford her infinite interest and delight.

"When I hear people condemned, I think none of us know how we might act under certain circumstances. If temptation stood in our pathway tomorrow, who can say he would not be weak enough to open his arms and embrace it ?

"Lady Everfair, who generally has a new craze every season on the principle actuating the man who married six wives because he was searching for a good one amongst them, has now adopted Bohemia as her kingdom, and regards its inhabitants as her subjects. For this reason she has asked some of them down to Greenwoods: they are delightful people, who give colour and flavour to society.

"Amongst other guests are Mrs. Marcus Phillips and her husband, a rising artist who painted the Beggar Maid. Mrs. Marcus Phillips writes novels under her former name, Mrs. Stonex Stanning.

"Mr. Newton Marrix is likewise here and claims the merit of having suggested that Lady Everfair should become a Bohemian queen; he addresses her as your majesty. They say all the queer characters in his books are taken from people well known in society.

"The other day her gracious majesty wondered he was not afraid of giving social portraits, he replied he was quite safe as people had entirely different views of their own characters from what he or the remainder of the world had, and therefore did not recognise his counterfeit presentments.

"His audacity is very entertaining, and Lady

Everfair delights in his free criticisms on her friends, which certainly are sometimes piquant.

"Yesterday morning he told us at breakfast he had a letter from Norfolk announcing that Lady Arthur Fields had been ill and had become most devout: but, he added, 'she is recovered now, even of her repentance.'

"There is another strange creature here, the poet Adrien Messieurs, of whom you must have heard. He is a confectionery rhymster, who culls sweets from other men's brains, which he cooks into dainty little *tartes de crème* and serves as literary dessert under the name of original poems.

"He affects solitude, looks melancholy, and possesses an inordinate share of vanity. To read his poems is punishment enough, but to hear him read them is terrible; this is an ordeal through which we pass on some occasions after dinner.

"Lord Harrick is also here. He is considered interesting from the fact that his wife, an artists' model, or one of that class, ran away with a lover about a year ago, and a week afterwards was drowned in a most romantic manner off the Cornwall coast. Lord Harrick went to Africa immediately after the affair, and has only now returned.

"But there is some one else here of more interest to me, because I think she will make an excellent wife for you.

"This is the pith of my letter, though I have given it at the end instead of in a postscript, where a woman stores ner choicest morsel of communication. She is an heiress, and has four thousand a year; moreover, she is quite alone in life so far as relatives count; you have not met her, as she has been abroad for the past ten years.

"I have known her long, and we have always

been friends. She is an accomplished and high-minded woman, and there is a sad story in connection with her life, which has heretofore prevented her accepting numerous offers of marriage made her.

"I have made up my mind you must marry her. You may say that, without position or wealth, this will be impossible; but I intend that it shall be possible.

"You must not, therefore, allow yourself to become a victim to the charms of any of your fair countrywomen, but preserve a whole heart till you return."

Fitzmaurice read this letter carefully. At first this suggestion of his marriage bewildered him, flattered his self-love, and set him thinking of his future, in no part of which Madge Rochford had share.

Four thousand a year meant a large sum to him, it would place him in an independent position, raise him above the sordid care of life that meant death to ambition, enable him to realize some of the schemes of which he had long dreamt.

But at thought of the unknown woman who was to bring him wealth, a discordant note sounded in the harmony of his future plans, for though cold and mercenary, there seemed something pitiful and mean in the idea of marrying for sake of gold alone.

Probably this was the current in the affairs of his existence which, taken at the flood might lead to fortune; should he sit idly on the bank and let the tide ebb, because of an idea which men in general would hold as a piece of foolish sentimentality?

Whilst considering these things, the memory of Mrs. Mundella Ryston came before him, and for the first time since he made her acquaintance, it was

associated with a sense of pain, which he dared not gauge.

He was surprised, she had spoken of the probability of his union in this mercenary way as if he were to sell himself, and his surprise was tinged with regret. She was more worldly than he had thought, the pleasure which her letter had at first given vanished before this consideration, and he replaced it in its envelope with a sigh.

"And yet she is right," he said, as one of these rapid changes of feeling characteristic of his nature came to him, "and the world is right. There is nothing like wealth, only they who have known its want can fully appreciate its worth."

CHAPTER XXII.

"MAIDEN FAIR, BE MINE," SAID HE.

"We shall lunch first," said Sir Lawrence, as he received his guests, "and afterwards visit the chrysanthemums, which I believe are really fine."

"My dear child is so fond of them," said Mrs. Rochford, who was unusually animated; there was a flush on her pale face, a light in her cold eyes, and a nervousness in her manner quite unusual to this placid and excellent woman.

Maurice sat down to luncheon with them, but to-day he was absent and silent, and took little heed of Madge, into whose face the brightness of sunlight came on his entering the room. He seemed scarcely conscious of the presence of this girl to whose life he had become a necessary happiness.

Sir Lawrence was buoyant; his spirits rose to vivaciousness during lunch, and he joked and laughed with his guests as if he were in the morning of life, and the world lay all before him.

From the effects of champagne his eyes sparkled, and when he spoke his teeth shone white and even under a moustache bright brown in hue.

With the prompt assistance of Mrs. Rochford he inveigled Madge into a conversation on gardening, while the rector interchanged a few words now and then with Fitzmaurice, in a voice that seemed more gentle and sad than usual.

The luncheon lasted almost an hour, then the party rose to visit the chrysanthemums, the head-gardener being in attendance.

Sir Lawrence, with Madge by his side, led the way across the wide marble-paved hall and entered the spacious drawing-room.

Opening the windows they passed down a flight of grey stone steps, dark with time, and flanked on either side by massive balustrades richly carved and ornamented by huge vases filled by branching palms.

The gardens of Usher Park were the show-grounds of the county. Green-houses were filled with rare plants and eastern shrubs; the rosery was a bower that might have had its counterpart in paradise, acres were devoted to flower-beds that presented a blaze of gorgeous colouring, and exhaled mingled fragrances.

Where this wealth of buds and blossoms ended were rich glades whose turf was smooth as velvet, long terraces with heavy balustrades and fountains, delightful pleasaunces, avenues studded with stately trees, and beyond all woods stretching for miles by the winding river.

Whether the owner was at home or abroad, the gardens were kept with equal care; they had been famous for over a century, and Sir Lawrence felt a just pride in them.

Never before had they looked so beautiful, he

thought, as he descended the stone steps, with Mrs. Rochford on one side of him and Madge on the other, whilst the rector and Maurice followed.

The mellow sunshine of this September day fell upon flower, tree and shrub with a warmth giving additional tone to the colouring; the air was clear, bright, and sweet with the scent of a myriad blossoms, and from the shelter of grand old trees, came the songs of birds repeated echo-like in every glade.

Madge let her eyes linger on this wealth of beauty and colour with which Nature's liberal hand had endowed this spot, and her eyes lighted from pleasure.

Sir Lawrence, quick to notice her expression, was gratified.

All things seemed to favour him to-day, Nature herself was in harmony with his mood, as if she understood his designs, and smiled upon them.

If only Madge would become his wife. He looked at her rounded chin, faultless in its delicate curve and almost voluptuous beauty, and noted her lips too beautifully human for comparison with Greek art.

Surely never was woman so graceful in contour, so lithe in her movements, so perfect in all ways, and yet so undefiled by worldly knowledge.

In the almost childlike smile flitting across her face, in the light lying in her eyes, were traces of a happy innocence such as Eve might have known before her fall.

If he could but win her love, verily his last years would experience a delight such as all former enjoyments crowded together could not equal.

He would retire from society, if she willed it, live with her here, happy in her mere presence, caring for no other joys which the world could give than her society, his whole life should be devoted to

her, he would worship her, be her slave, joyfully sacrifice all things to her good-will and pleasure.

She should be his queen, his hope, his pearl above all price, his love for her should never set, never know shadow or night; with her by his side his days would be all brightness and joy. As these thoughts flashed through his mind, his heart beat as rapidly as if he were a beardless boy wooing his first love in a bower.

The suspense he felt until he could ask her the question which was to decide his happiness or misery was painful; he was glad he had fixed on this day, but as the time approached for him to speak his heart sank.

What if she were to refuse him? He felt miserable at the thought, but surely this could not be; the world could not be so bright, so full of happiness if he were to be made the most wretched of mankind.

"No, no; he would accept the omen of sunshine which the sky held out to him to-day, he would take heart of grace and hope for her consent with as much ardour as saints long for Paradise.

The while he walked as in a dream; she was beside him listening to the gardener's technical details concerning the growth of chrysanthemums, quite unconscious of the wild tumult of doubts and hopes of which she was the centre, passing through the baronet's ancient breast.

"These chrysanthemums are lovely, are they not, Mr. Fitzmaurice?" Mrs. Rochford said, somewhat suddenly. "And what flower is this?" she asked, leading him to another bed at a little distance. "Do you know," she continued, speaking in a nervous and hurried tone, when they had proceeded some distance from where Sir Lawrence and Madge were standing, "it is quite warm for September,

and I feel a little tired. Will you allow me to take your arm? Thanks, I shouldn't wonder if we had showers presently—how enchanting these gardens are, quite lovely, one never seems to see them thoroughly in a day, to me they have always some new beauty," she added.

Her manner was unusually friendly, he began to marvel at this sudden change.

"Yes, they are the best kept grounds if not in all Ireland, at least in the South. Sir Lawrence is proud to hear them praised, and delighted when he sees allusion made to them in the press."

"Ah! what a very charming man," she said, directing their course down one of the long terraces which ended in a leafy glade such as Watteau might have painted on a fan for Madame de Caylus, and peopled with courtiers in powdered wigs whispering love to the high-heeled satin-gowned beauties of Louis XV.'s court.

"He is," said Maurice briefly, half turning to see the rector talking earnestly to the gardener, but not catching sight of the baronet or Madge.

"And I—we were all so glad," continued Mrs. Rochford, not pretending to notice his backward glance, but pursuing her course steadily, "to know he had been a friend to you."

"Thank you, I am quite sure of that!" replied Maurice.

"How very fortunate it was. I'm sure you appreciate Sir Lawrence's kindness," she added looking down.

"It was lucky for me I called on him; my star I suppose must have been in the ascendant; and as for Sir Lawrence no one could act with more delicate thought, more consideration, more generosity than he did from the first hour I met him. I can never forget his goodness."

"I am glad to hear you say so," she answered, as if she had now received the cue for which she had been waiting. "Very glad because—" here she paused and lowered her eyes once more.

"Because?" repeated Maurice.

"I think you will rejoice at anything tending to his happiness."

"Certainly," he answered a little puzzled.

Mrs. Rochford gave him one rapid glance with her clear cold eyes and said:

"I think—nay, I know I can trust you with a secret."

Maurice bowed in silence, wondering what she had to reveal that concerned the baronet.

"You may have noticed," she added, elevating her head in a way which imparted dignity to her words, "Sir Lawrence has paid my daughter considerable attention since first he saw her at the dinner-party; of course you did," she continued, hurriedly, "it was evident he had fallen in love with her, and to-day——"

"Yes," Maurice said anxiously.

"I fancy he means to propose to her!"

He heard her in breathless astonishment, stood still, drooped his arms to his side and faced Mrs. Rochford.

Looking at him she saw her words had come upon with a surprise for which he was totally unprepared, but she could not read the mingled feelings of regret and relief which for the moment struggled hard for mastery in his mind: regret that at one sweep the romance of his life, associations connected with his better self, and with the freshest years of his past should be blotted out; relief that he too was free to make a mercenary marriage, for he had no doubt Madge would accept the Baronet's offer.

Suddenly a new thought flashed on him. Perhaps she was not aware Sir Lawrence had fallen in love with her, was about to propose for her; she might even reject him, for Maurice could not but feel and know she loved him, and then—and then—what would be the consequence?

For just a moment some feeling like gladness and warmth begotten by the remembrance of her bright face touched his heart, made it beat quicker, but these emotions quickly passed like a gleam of sunshine on an April day, and then came the cold, calculating thought, would not her love destroy the prospects of his life just opening before him, ay, and even now mar her own?

Her refusal of the baronet was not to be thought of; Maurice and she were poor; she had an immediate chance of making a wealthy marriage, and surely no boy and girl sentiment that had sprung from their early association, and would die in a year or two, should be allowed to stand between them and their respective prospects.

But love was to a woman the core of her heart, the centre of life, and what if she proved weak, and rejected the chance which fate had thrown in her way? If she did it was his duty to point out the foolishness of this step, and tell her plainly, if necessary, she was unwise in loving him.

Even as this idea dawned on him, some feeling akin to pain touched him, but passed swiftly away. No foolish emotions must be allowed to come between him and the prospects of his future, he must never think of Madge as his wife; she was charming, his beau-ideal of womanhood, and he would marry her if she were rich; but, dowerless as she was, union with her was impossible. One cannot live on love, he said mentally, drawing a quick breath that sounded like a sigh.

Whilst these thoughts rapidly passed through his mind Mrs. Rochford observed him closely.

"I see," she said, "this news has been rather a surprise to you."

"Is Miss Rochford aware of Sir Lawrence's intentions?" he asked.

"Madge dear child, is so unused to the ways of the world," said Mrs. Rochford, gently, "I believe she has taken his attentions as ordinary politeness, and his proposal, I fear will come unexpectedly."

"That is probable," he said, uttering the words mechanically, for his mind was still busy with speculations concerning her acceptance or rejection of Sir Lawrence.

"It is a brilliant offer for her," said Mrs. Rochford, looking at the great square house with its balustraded summit, and general air of stateliness, then at the surrounding grounds, finally letting her gaze stray to the wide park lands and dense woods sloping to the Nore.

"A wonderful match for the dear child, but she is worthy of it. Don't you think so?" she asked striving to probe his thoughts.

"I do," he answered readily, "but what if she does not regard it in the same light, what if she refuses Sir Lawrence?"

"I have thought of such a possibility," said Mrs. Rochford a cloud passing over her face, "and it is concerning that I desire to speak."

He did not answer and an awkward pause ensued between them. By mutual consent they bent their steps towards a neighbouring glade, patches of shadow and sunshine lay upon the sward, the songs of birds sounded above them.

"I am aware," she began without looking at him, "that a friendship always existed between you and my dear child. Your father and Mr. Rochford were

and are old friends, it was most natural, and even as you both grew up, neither her father nor I thought it worth while to interrupt what we considered the brotherly and sisterly regard you entertained for each other—nothing more ; that it would go beyond that, we never believed, for of course religion, and to speak plainly want of means on your part would prove insurmountable barriers to any closer tie in the future."

She paused but, he making no answer, she continued :

"We trusted to your honour, Mr. Fitzmaurice, that you would not think of exacting a promise from my daughter who is yet a mere child I may say, or speak of your future as in any way connected with hers ; we have not, I hope," she added with evident anxiety, "trusted in vain."

"You have not," he answered. "I have never by a word coupled our future. I have never asked her to give me a promise, save that she would write to me when I was in London."

"Thank you for this assurance," said Mrs. Rochford, much relieved.

"And now," she continued, "I shall not ask what your feelings are towards my dear child, but I'm sure you must on consideration feel glad of such a prospect and settlement as her marriage with Sir Lawrence must secure. The slight chances of her making a good marriage have often caused me uneasiness, but this turn of fortune's wheel makes me more than happy. You have recently seen a little of the world, but that little must have taught you the value of position and wealth, and on the other hand, all their loss entails."

"It has," he answered.

"And you will admit," she went on, "that such an offer as this may come but once in a life. There

is of course some disparity in their years, but people cannot have all they desire. I have no doubt the dear child will be happy with him, and I will ask you," she said slowly but firmly, "by your old friendship for her and for us, and by all you owe to Sir Lawrence, not to hinder her by word or deed from accepting his proposal, if she is so foolish as to hesitate."

"You need have no fear," he replied, "in that respect." Then a sudden thought flashing across his mind, that promptly developed into resolution, he added. "I shall do more even than you ask. I have reason to believe, though from no words of hers," he said looking down and speaking with hesitation, "that my opinions concerning her marriage would have some influence on her decision, and I will, if you desire it," he continued, "write urging her to accept Sir Lawrence's proposal."

"That is indeed noble of you. I always thought you were her friend—her true friend," said Mrs. Rochford delightedly; "and I am sure of it now. How can I thank you?"

Meanwhile Sir Lawrence with slow steps, had led Madge towards the rosery, where she thought her mother and Fitzmaurice had preceded them.

"I think after all," she said, "there is no flower so beautiful as the rose, nor none so quick to wither."

"They are beautiful," said the baronet. "My dear young lady will you wear one that I give you?" he added, plucking and handing her a rose as he spoke.

"Thank you Sir Lawrence," she said taking it from him and placing it in her breast.

She was so happy, all the beauty and sunshine of the day seemed reflected in her face; the music of birds' songs was in her heart; the warm sweet air

kissed her, and the nearest roses, trained against the trellis-work lining the path by which she walked, stretched out to touch her as she passed.

"These are the flowers of love," said Sir Lawrence gallantly, looking at the wealth of bloom and colour surrounding him and waving his hand gracefully towards them.

A light came into her face, and thoughts awakened by his words, rose in her mind, though he held no part in them.

"How delightful the grounds are, they bloom whilst everywhere else shows signs of decay," she said.

"To me," he replied, slowly, "they may henceforth become as barren as a desert, but whether they will change to a wilderness, or remain a paradise, depends dear lady on you."

"On me," she said in surprise, opening her glorious eyes, and looking at him without comprehending the meaning of his words.

"Yes, and on you depends the happiness or misery of my remaining years. Miss Rochford—Madge, I love you. I have loved you from the night I first saw you, and you sang to me; say all my hopes have not been in vain, dear Miss Rochford, will you become my wife?"

She stood startled and speechless. In her eyes came a look of wonder, unmixed with any trace of pleasure. No thought of affection for this man had ever crossed her mind, and now that he expressed his love and asked her to become his wife, something like horror crept over her, she could scarcely refrain from shuddering.

All the music died in her heart as if a chill had crept in there with his words; the sunlight died suddenly from her face as if clouds had come between her and future happiness.

"There is a difference in our years but my heart and spirits are young, my interests and enjoyments in life are vigorous, and there is nothing which I shall not do to render your existence happy, to give you pleasure shall be the study of my days," he said, as she still stood silent and wonder-stricken, her eyes fixed upon his face.

He bent down and raised one of her hands to his lips. His kiss seemed to wake her to the reality of his words.

She started and withdrew her hand hastily with what was almost a gesture of repulsion, and the rose he had given her fell crushed at her feet.

"This is a surprise for which I was not prepared," she replied abruptly, scarcely knowing what she said. "I thank you for your offer, Sir Lawrence, but—but it is impossible for me to accept it," and she turned to retrace her steps.

There was nothing left for him but to follow her.

"Do not say impossible," he replied, "it is a cruel word. You tell me I have taken you by surprise, this was wrong of me. I had flattered myself that for the past month my attentions were not unacceptable, and before speaking to you I had the consent of your father, and I am sure the approbation of your mother."

At this she looked at him in surprise, but made no reply.

Was there a plot, she wondered, to make her marry him ?

"Think over what I have said, and do not let an answer too readily spoken, crush all hope and happiness from my life," said Sir Lawrence, gallant to the last.

"Am I to congratulate you, Sir Lawrence," said Mrs. Rochford, in a low tone, as she stood with him for a moment in the hall before departing.

"Not yet," he said disconsolately, "but I have hopes."

Mrs. Rochford felt disappointed, but hid her vexation.

"Girls never know their own minds," she replied with an attempt at cheerfulness, "and they often say 'no,' when they mean 'yes,' you must not have a faint heart, Sir Lawrence."

The baronet bowed, but this time his bow was unaccompanied by his usual smile.

Whilst she spoke Maurice saw Madge into the back seat of the rector's little pony-carriage. She was pale, trembling, and confused; once her eyes met his with a wistful expression, as if imploring his love and help.

Fitzmaurice turned away his gaze and whispered, "I know what has happened, I shall write to you to-morrow."

Then without looking at her he re-entered the house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WOULD HE PROVE TRUE?

FOR the remainder of that bright autumn day Madge wandered about her home as one in a dream, restlessly moving from room to room, speaking but in monosyllables, and absorbed in thought. This proposal suddenly revealed how little her heart was in her own possession; how wholly she had given it to another.

Never had she known until now what love was; before she had regarded the feeling something akin to the feelings binding mother to child, but now she recognised it as a force that deepened and

changed the current of nature, an influence subtle and mysterious underlaying the surface of existence, fateful for joy or sorrow, happiness or despair. From the peace of past days, from the feelings of her girlhood's years, she suddenly awoke as from a dream; the emotions of womanhood rose in her heart, tossing it in a whirlwind of conflicting feelings.

All her past placid life had gone by for ever, had vanished in a few brief moments as if the words spoken in the rosary had been the utterance of a talisman, and she became conscious her coming years must be filled with unbounded joy or with misery too wretched for conception.

Her heart stood still as thoughts of Sir Lawrence flashed across her mind. He had presumed to offer her his affections. Were his words uttered in mockery when he asked her to share her life with him; and, if not, what had she done that fate allowed him to come as a shadow between her and him who was the sun of all her days?

Sir Lawrence was rich, he could give her position and wealth, surround her with all the world holds fair, but these things crumbled into dust and ashes beneath the touchstone of her affection.

Was ever a heart so full as hers of riches stored grudgingly for the object of its worship? Oh, that she were a man, no hand, no law should keep her back from the confession of this burden weighing her down with the fulness of its treasures.

All night she could not sleep from dwelling on this crisis that had come so unexpectedly in her life, until the thoughts burned into her brain. Through hours of darkness the light of hope rose, flickered, and sank alternately. Perhaps, after all, Maurice did not love her.

She could scarce conceive such a cruel possibility,

the mere thought of which was agony to her and disloyalty to him. Had he not said he would write to her? She felt sure he would defend her against such a destiny as that Sir Lawrence proposed, would give her courage to withstand any pressure her mother might bring to bear; with these reflections she barred out the evil doubt that visited her in an hour of darkness and pain.

When morning dawned she rose early, and waited patiently until letters were brought to the rectory; but, alas, there was not one for her amongst the number, and a feeling of the fear which beset her on the previous night returned once more.

Why did he lose a moment in assuring her of his love, in giving her confidence and courage, in writing words she could not doubt?

At breakfast she was silent. Neither of her parents made any remark as to what had passed on the previous day, though she felt sure both of them were aware of Sir Lawrence's proposal; she was grateful for a consideration sparing her much torment.

The meal being over, she went into the garden, hoping and believing Maurice would join her there presently; she expected to see him whenever she raised her head; she listened to every step and sound, awaiting him always, whilst her heart fluttered at the thought of his approach. But more than an hour passed, an hour that seemed the length of three, and yet he had not come; presently she went back towards the house feeling weary and depressed.

As she returned she caught sight of the Corporal coming from the garden-gate to the rectory, and in an instant she knew he bore a message for her. She would have run to meet him, but her natural

reserve kept her back; assuming as much calmness as possible, she went towards him.

When he divined her purpose, he stood to attention and saluted her.

"Good mornin', miss, an' it's right glad I am t' see you lookin' well, miss."

"Thank you Casey," she replied in a voice as steady as she could command.

"An' I hope his reverence an' the mistress is well, miss."

"Yes thank you," she answered, burning with an impatience she dared not betray.

"Well, miss, maybe you're surprised t' see me here t' day so early, but this is how it came about. Afther breakfast I was diggin' in the garden, an' the old masther was readin' the paper inside, when who does I see comin' along the road but Masther Maurice himself, as hard as he could walk, an' says I to meself, 'It's early you're comin' this mornin' anyhow, but maybe Sir Lawrence is gone into the city for the day,' an' when Masther Maurice got inside the garden door, over he comes t' me without as much offerin' t' go into the house, an' I noticed the pleasant look wasn't on his face, but he was dull-lookin' as he used to be, you know, miss, when things used to go troublesome with the ould masther long ago."

"Yes," she answered, all attention to him now.

"But when he's that way, I dursn't ask him for the world what's the matther with him, he get's that dark and distant. 'Sure,' says I t' meself, 'maybe there's something up atween himself and Sir Lawrence,' but me mind was soon set aisy on that point, for the moment he come over, he says, 'Casey,' says he, 'I want you to go at once to the rectory,' says he, 'an' take this letter to Miss Madge.' 'What'll I say, Masther Maurice?' says

I. 'Nothin',' says he, an' without as much as another word he left me; so I just runs into the house to put on me coat, an' then I brought it over to you, miss," he continued, producing an envelope from his pocket, "an' sure if I may make so bould, Miss Madge, as to say it, I hope there's nothing wrong atween you an' Masther Maurice; for sure he has a good heart, though I never could make him out, but I know he has a good heart for all that, an' I hope, miss, you'll excuse me sayin' it."

Madge felt grateful for the words of praise he had given the man she loved, then she took the letter from the Corporal's hand.

"No, Casey there is nothing wrong," she answered.

"An' it's glad I am of it Miss Madge, an' sure," he added with a smile as he turned to leave, "may you both live long an' happy."

The Corporal wheeled round, saluted her once more and retired.

At his last words the girl's face grew crimson and her eyes brightened. She quickly entered the house, and gaining her bed-room, locked the door and took her favourite seat by the window.

From this spot she could see the garden where they had often walked, the red-brick wall beyond where long ago he had nailed the plum-tree which she had called hers, the apple tree under which they had both stood the day he had returned from London.

Every inch of the ground seemed filled with recollections of him—recollections that made her regard it as a sacred spot. She turned her eyes from these familiar objects to the letter which was to decide her fate, trembling with excitement.

Surely he would save her, come and stand between her and the fate which threatened her.

He would be her true knight, her loyal love, her defender, if necessary.

Her eyes fixed themselves on the envelope as if she would divine the message it contained, then with trembling fingers she tore the cover, took out the closely-written sheet of paper it contained, and read his words to the end without pausing. The letter began abruptly.

“I heard news yesterday that at first caused me some surprise, but which now seems to me what might have been expected ; I heard Sir Lawrence had asked you to become his wife, and quite voluntarily I write to offer you such advice as I should give a sister if I had one, and the like proposal were made her, for we have from childhood been friends, and I shall always feel glad of whatever tends to your advantage. Of late I have seen a little of the world, and that little served to show me the benefits and pleasures station and wealth, such as have been offered to you, can command, and on the other hand the bitterness and vexation which must be endured by a life struggling for such advantages. Every day men’s and women’s finest sentiments and truest feelings are sacrificed and broken on the wheel of iron fortune. Every day love yields to anxiety, and care banishes affection from the heart. But you cannot know this, because your experience is of the slightest. Were it possible for me to marry wealth—even if my future wife were many years my senior—I should not hesitate to avail myself of what I should consider a happy chance. Therefore I trust you will consider Sir Lawrence’s offer. There is a wide disparity in years between you, but this disadvantage will be counterbalanced by many favours you may enjoy as his wife. His age will not I believe, affect your

happiness ; he is courteous, generous, kind-hearted, and in manner and disposition calculated to make the woman he marries content with her choice. I trust, therefore, you will allow me to congratulate you on what I regard as your good fortune.

“Believe me,

“Always your friend,

“MAURICE FITZMAURICE.”

Having finished, she held the letter in her hand as if it fascinated, her face grew pale, she bent her head until her chin touched her breast, her eyes expressed a pitiful look of hopeless agony, her arms hung listlessly by her side, with a simple gesture of despondency more eloquent of grief than storms of hysterical passion.

A numb feeling like the coming of death, crept slowly from her heart into her brain, making her feel faint and sick, and for some moments depriving her of the consciousness of all things, save that a great misery had suddenly fallen on her life, and would remain with her not only to-day, to-morrow, next day, the next week, and through the year, but for ever.

She was surrounded by desolation, from which no pathway led ; by misery from which there was no relief ; and this pain that wounded her mortally and cruelly was bitter, terribly bitter. All her days would be turned to nights, all her nights to hours of silent misery.

His mere presence had filled her with happiness ; one look from him repaid her for hours of expectation and waiting ; even his utterance of her name had made her the happiest living thing in creation.

The fault was not his ; he had not deceived her ; it must have been her own love, which through blindness had made her think he had repaid her in kind.

She put up her hands to her face, as if to shut from her mental view the sight of all she had lost.

Some feeling close akin to despair had fallen on her whilst she was unprepared. The hardest blow fate can inflict had been suddenly and mercilessly dealt her, and she lay crushed, helpless, and writhing under the stroke.

As one just waked from a dream, with all her senses dull, she rose from the seat, mechanically walked across the room to the bedside and knelt there, as she had daily done since her childhood ; she could not pray.

"How I loved—how I loved him," she said to herself in a whisper, "and I love him still."

The words had forced themselves to her lips from the helpless, hopeless agony of her unsatisfied heart. A quick sigh escaped her, then came a low cry that quivered in the air like the sound of a violin string snapped in the expression of a note, then a storm of passionate tears sweeping down the barrier of reserve in its strength, shook her frame and made her sob long and piteously above the new-made grave where her love was laid.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SAD WAS HER HEART.

DAYS lengthened into weeks, and yet neither peace nor rest came to her.

"Dear child !" said Mrs. Rochfort, speaking of her to the baronet when he called about a week after his proposal. "I know she has been thinking seriously of what you said to her, Sir Lawrence—I know she has, and you have promised to give her time."

"Certainly," he said with his usual courteous smile.

"We," continued Mrs. Rochford, "though sincerely gratified by your proposal, and desiring it as the best means of securing the happiness of our dear child, have left her perfectly uninfluenced, so that, when she accepts your offer, as I trust she soon may, it will be quite a voluntary act."

"Of course, of course," remarked the baronet, gathering hope and comfort from the matron's words.

What she had said regarding no influence having been brought to bear on Madge was true. Mrs. Rochford had seen the Corporal deliver Maurice's letter, and afterwards noted and understood the effect it had upon her daughter. She therefore wisely refrained from speaking of her condition, and did not yet urge her to the step she desired should take place.

"In a little time when she has recovered the effect of her disappointment, I will speak to her," Mrs. Rochford said to the rector, who was made acquainted with the conversation she had had with Maurice in the garden of Usher Park House, and of his offer; "and really the young man has behaved very well. He is the soul of honour," added the matron.

The rector bowed his iron-grey head in calm assent: whatever his better-half said was of course true, but he reflected, if he had been in Fitzmaurice's place, he would have married the girl in defiance of the world, and he secretly despised the young man for the part he played.

But Mr. Rochford was wise in his generation, and kept his thoughts to himself; a piece of self-suppression frequently necessary to the peace of a household, as many men know from experience.

To Madge, during the weeks following the hour she had read Fitzmaurice's letter, all the world seemed void, the sunshine had lost its brightness, the beauty of all things which before had filled her with delight had gone; the memory of past pleasures her bygone days had afforded now came back and mocked her.

Life had lost its flavour; her mind was stunned, her senses numbed; she was heedless of all around her, feeling only a gnawing pain at her heart—a restless, unsatisfied desire that cried out and would not be stilled.

A great grief, underlying the thoughts, words, and actions of the day and making no sign, sitting at the bed-side through long watches of nights and rising with her at morning to dog her footsteps, spectre-like, silent, and unseen, had come to her, and the burden of her life was great.

She had read time was the healer of all sorrows, and now in her dire affliction, she looked forward wondering if the coming years would render her callous to misery or subdue the heart-pain sapping the brightness and vitality of her days.

The idol she had worshipped was not of pure gold as she had blindly believed, but of base clay, and yet, fallen as it was and broken at her feet, she mourned over it, tear-stained, sorrow-stricken, and crushed.

She was on a sea, surrounded by hopeless darkness, powerless in this storm that had suddenly risen and wrecked her trust and mercilessly scattered the blossoms of her happiness.

Her cheeks grew from pale to pallid; her steps, once buoyant, lost their vigor.

She went about her daily occupations as usual, but scarcely ever accomplished the household duties which had by custom fallen to her lot.

The memories which every pathway and tree in the garden brought before her were painful. The light and colour seemed to mock her; she wondered how Nature, that hitherto seemed in unison with her every mood, could rejoice whilst happiness lay dead in her heart and she sat in rayless darkness.

Her mother was more gentle than usual. Madge's grief had touched her, but she believed it would prove a passing cloud, which might serve to make the remainder of her days brighter. Few girls, she thought, marry the objects of their first love, and they never break their hearts as a consequence, but marry afterwards and make excellent wives in good time.

It would be so with Madge. A marriage for her with Fitzmaurice was impossible, whilst an alliance with Sir Lawrence was all that could be desired, and Mrs. Rochford was sufficiently spiritual to trust Providence would bring round all things as she desired in a little while.

The rector, however, was not so satisfied as his spouse with the turn affairs had taken; he stealthily watched Madge at meals as she made pretence or forced herself to eat; noted her languid steps, saw the old brightness had faded from her face, that her eyes no longer met his with pleasure, missed the music of her voice in those snatches of song or wordless thrills of melody he had heretofore been wont to hear all through the day.

Yet he felt powerless to act, and knew not what to say. Mrs. Rochford had told him this experience through which their daughter was passing was common to the lives of all girls. They were all romantic, she said; she had known this phase herself, she added, and was sure the mood would pass from Madge like an April shower before sunshine.

But the shower lasted longer than this wise woman

anticipated, and September glided into October, and October to November before the girl's grief passed from the violent to the passive stage.

Outwardly she was changed. The old smile was no longer on her lips, the old light had departed from her eyes and left behind an expression of weariness. She looked on life without hope, all things became indifferent to her, all days passed by in colourless monotony.

"Do you know my dear, how kind and attentive Sir Lawrence has been, sending you fruit and flowers continually," said her mother one day early in December.

They were sitting in the little study opening from the drawing-room and looked on the garden, enclosed by its high dark red walls.

A heavy rain had been falling drearily all through the dull day, the sky was covered with lowering clouds, all the world was cheerless. Outside, the trees stood bare and gaunt, dead leaves lay on patches of damp grass, and were stored in little heaps on the pathways; the clay of empty flower beds looked sodden and black, and the few shrubs of which the place could boast were saturated with wet.

There was no spot of brightness or colour on which the eye could rest in this picture of dull monotonous hues; the only sound falling on the ear was the ceaseless splashing of rain on the water-soaked earth.

Mrs. Rochford lay back in an arm-chair by the fire, facing the rector who sat dosing, his hand supporting his head, his eyes half closed, a volume of archæological reports open on his knees.

"Sir Lawrence has been very kind," remarked Mrs. Rochford, who was not to be daunted because not receiving reply to her first observation.

"Yes," said Madge, absently looking out through the windows dull with moisture, to the hen coop against the far wall where the fowls stood inside the wire paling, their feathers ruffled, their heads on one side, as if meditating sagely upon the effects on the world at large of this unhappy mood of nature.

"He is certainly very attentive to you, dear," Mrs. Rochford continued, not looking at the girl, but staring at the grate, where red embers made glowing pictures in the fire. "Don't you think so, Madge?"

"Yes, I suppose he is."

"And you know he admires you very much; indeed, he is quite fond of you."

The shadow of a smile, cold and mocking, came on the girl's lips for a second, but she made no answer.

"He would do everything possible to make you happy; and this prompts me to speak to you concerning a subject on which I have been long silent."

Madge, sitting yet by the window, slightly shuddered.

"You know you have no dowry," said her mother, speaking in a cold and measured tone, "and if anything were to happen your father or myself I don't know what would become of you. We are obliged to live up to your father's income, which is not large. Of course he has his life insured," she continued calmly, "but that could not last long——"

"Pray don't," said the girl.

"It may be painful," continued Mrs. Rochford unmoved, "but it is my duty to put matters plainly before you, and from the little I have said you can imagine what an anxiety your future must be to us, and how happy it would make us if you were well settled."

The book fell from the rector's knees, and the noise made him open his eyes.

"You have heard what I have said to Madge," said Mrs. Rochford, in an icy voice.

"Yes; it is quite true, quite true," he replied, answering the quick reproachful glance of his wife's eyes.

"Need I say," continued Mrs. Rochford, "how happy it will make us if you accept Sir Lawrence's proposal. It is an offer not one girl in a hundred would for a moment think of refusing. He is generous, courteous, kind, a most estimable man in every respect."

"Very," said the rector drily, in reply to a second glance the wife of his bosom had directed towards him.

"And such a marriage would give you at once position and wealth such as I had not dared to hope you would ever gain," said the matron loftily.

"Never," put in the rector, solemnly.

"And, indeed, no higher proof of Sir Lawrence's amiability could be given than the patience with which he has waited for your answer, notwithstanding your coldness and indifference which I must say is marked, very marked, indeed; but this he has overlooked.

"Yes, indeed," said the rector as if speaking to himself.

"And I think, Madge, you have treated him badly. My dear child remember your future; think of all your mere word will secure for you, and then consider the happiness of your parents, whose lives are bound in your interests, and who, being older and wiser than you, know how you should act in this matter, and advise you only for your own ultimate happiness."

She paused, but the girl made no reply to her words.

"Tell Sir Lawrence you will become his wife," pleaded Mrs. Rochford.

Madge started at these words, then looked at the lowering sky in whose wide expanse there was no ray of light ; it seemed to her symbolic of her fate.

What became of her life, where or in what way her days should be spent gave her no concern ; an icy spell bound her which could never be broken, her heart was dead and no power time could wield would be capable of waking it to existence again.

Her blood seemed frozen, her senses lay in a state of torpor, the horror which the thought of her union with Sir Lawrence had once created now subsided to a state of indifference. It mattered little in whose companionship she was to spend the remainder of her days, better perhaps in the baronet's than in that of a younger, more exacting, and less generous man.

Then this alliance might prove of service to her parents, and would give them comfort and pleasure, as her mother had said. Why should she hesitate to please them when it involved so little sacrifice to herself ?

"Will my marriage make you both happy ?" she asked turning her face, that looked whiter for its surrounding gloom, towards them as she spoke ; her eyes reflected the indifference of despair, a note of hopeless weariness sounded in her voice.

"My dear, dear child," said her mother, taken by surprise at her sudden question, "I feel as if it will lengthen our days."

"It will indeed," said the rector, picking up his book and speaking as if he repeated a lesson.

"Then——" she began, but faltered as if the words stuck in her throat.

"You will marry him ?" said Mrs. Rochford,

rising from her chair and advancing rapidly and eagerly to her daughter's side.

"I will," the girl replied with downcast looks and white lips that trembled as she spoke.

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER MARRIAGE.

MADGE ROCHFORD became my Lady Usher, and the little world by which she was surrounded, wondered much, declared her singularly fortunate, and congratulated her in no measured terms. To such felicitations, she listened with secondary interest, as if the person of whom they spoke was one she had known in the past, but who had no connection with her present life.

She had spoken the words which made her Sir Lawrence Usher's wife in the Grantsborough church where she had worshipped from childhood.

The rays of a February sun shone through the high, many-paned windows, brightening the old carving of the narrow time-worn pews, glinting on the pipes of the organ in their oak frame, and on the ancient brass work let into the walls, bearing strange inscriptions in monkish Latin, and half obliterated figures of abbots with mitre, a crozier and episcopal cope.

The nuptial benediction had been pronounced by her father, whose slow sonorous voice fell on her ears with solemnity.

Throughout the ceremony there was neither joy in her eyes nor regret, only insensibility to all things, as if her youth had been frozen. Her words and movements seemed mechanical, her face was white as the dress she wore.

Snow lay on the ground, covered the leaves of the evergreens, and sparkled coldly in the morning sunlight, all the world looked chill and ghastly.

The bride and bridegroom spent the honeymoon in Paris, and from thence journeyed to Nice, but in the first days of May they arrived in London, for Sir Lawrence was proud of his youthful bride, and wished to introduce her to society.

The world had shown Lady Usher nothing that had succeeded in waking her interests, her new position had brought her no sensation of happiness, the chain of indifference binding her had never once been broken.

She was not less beautiful than before, for nothing save death could rob her eyes of their light, or destroy the contour of her features; but her loveliness was more like that of an animated statue in which the senses lay dormant.

It could scarcely be called a great depression, this feeling which never left her night nor day, nor restlessness, but merely a long-continued torpor which paralysed her mental life. No murmur of discontent rose to her lips, no glance of dissatisfaction fell from her eyes, the calmness of death had fallen on her.

Life seemed an unreality, a drama in which she was forced to play a part by circumstance, but in which she had neither interest nor pleasure; a colourless routine of monotonous events, through which she lived day after day, forgetful of yesterday, heedless of to-morrow, clinging to no memory of the past, cherishing no hope of the future.

To Sir Lawrence she was submissive, obedient as a child, gentle in all ways, and he was satisfied; he had gained the prize he sought with many hopes and fears. She was beautiful and young, and he loved youth and beauty; that these good

gifts were combined in the person of his wife flattered his vanity, and made him proud of his possession.

She was not a loving wife, it was true, but he scarce expected she would be; the difference in their years rendered affection impossible; if he felt disappointed he was never heard to murmur, for regrets, he said, not only ruin the happiness of one's own life, but destroy all harmony in the lives of those around us.

One of the greatest pleasures in existence is, living with perfectly polite people, and the baronet's natural courtesy being developed by training to a high art, Lady Usher found her existence was not intolerable.

He was amiable, good-tempered, and gallant, considerate of others, willing to take pleasure in all things, anxious to close his eyes to the disagreeable side of life, ever ready to utter pleasant phrases in the proper place, the graciousness of which were enhanced by his polished manner. If he suffered from rheumatism, gout, or other ills of life, from which even such an urbane specimen of humanity was unfortunately not exempt, he never betrayed his ailments to her by word or look; he ignored age as impertinent and intrusive, and preferred, instead of creeping with slow sad steps into the night of life, to dance onwards to the gates of death amidst lights flowers music and perfume, rouged smiling elegant and gallant to the last.

Almost immediately after Sir Lawrence's marriage Maurice had returned to town. He still retained his post as secretary, but his duties during the baronet's absence were necessarily light. He was desired to open the baronet's letters, answer such as were not important, referring the others

to Sir Lawrence for instructions, forward him London papers, write frequent epistles full of town gossip, club scandal, and the latest political rumours such as might escape the press, or be omitted as too insignificant for insertion.

"It is the world's whisperings that amuse us," Sir Lawrence said; "its facts are always a bore. Gossip is the most dainty flower in the garden of conversation, its perfume tickles the senses, and gives us appetite for the enjoyment of our neighbours' misfortunes."

He delighted in social letters.

"Every fellow with a penny in his pocket who wishes to amuse himself can buy a paper, but how comparatively few are enabled by the ability and courtesy of their friends to enjoy the luxury of readable letters. The days when correspondence was a fine art have passed away; epistolary eloquence died with the introduction of the penny post."

Maurice, therefore, filled his letters with all the gossip he could collect from his friends or cull from society journals. When these failed to occupy the required space, he drew on his imagination, for the baronet did not much care if his news were true or false, providing it was well told, and his secretary's letters satisfied him in this respect.

When Maurice had completed his daily duties, he usually found he had much spare time, which he became anxious to utilise. On this subject he determined to consult Purcell.

The latter had returned to London soon after the announcement had spread through Grantsborough of Miss Rochford's marriage with Sir Lawrence.

He had departed quite suddenly to the consternation of his aunts, who only consented to his leaving

on exacting a promise that he would spend some months with them next year.

"Remember," said Aunt Maria, "you are the only one left to us now, and Richard dear, I look upon you as my son," she concluded, envying for the first time in her life the privileges and claims of motherhood.

"Now I have found rest for the sole of my foot," he answered a grave look coming for a moment into his eyes, "in such a spot as this, I am not likely to forget it."

"And you will come back to us next summer?" said Aunt Allie; "in our little narrow world your return will be something to live for."

"Certainly I shall," he made answer.

He returned to town with a strange feeling of loneliness at his heart such as he had never before experienced, and a depression which he did not overcome for weeks.

"I have been too long out of harness," he said, "and my imagination has run riot with me; but a month's hard work of ten or twelve hours a day will soon set me right again. Labour for the brain is like physic for the body, and one is as necessary as the other, brain and body being liable to disorders for which we cannot account. Because I was a few miles away from the noise and bustle of city life, I imagined myself in an arcadia where women never sold themselves for money, where happiness was never bartered for a title. But the world is the same all over, human nature does not alter because surrounded by fields and trees instead of bricks and mortar; the same change is given for gold in the wilds of Connemara as in civilised Belgravia, and the worship it inspires is universal. But who would have thought such mere vulgar ambition could have been sheltered under a face of

such innocence as Madge Rochford's; who could have fancied such love of dross lay in her heart whilst the light of heaven shone in her eyes. Women are all the same; for all of them there is more virtue in a set of diamonds than in an honest heart, more merit in a title than in faithful love. How Fitzmaurice must have felt, poor lad; it's a bitter lesson for one so young, but it's a wholesome experience after all."

Richard Purcell went to work again, seeking relief in his art from the feelings which struggled for mastery in his mind, and wrote—what were to him some very realistic chapters of a new novel, that fair subscribers to Mr. Mudie's library thought deeply interesting.

"We writers put our best and truest feelings into our books," he said, "and then, when the first trifler we meet in a club-room accuses us of sentiment, we laugh at the idea, and apologetically declare 'that kind of thing pays in novels, you know.' I wonder if our readers ever think that our daily lives are reflected in our pages."

Shortly after his return to town, Maurice called on him.

Purcell had chambers at Chelsea. His sitting-room was the acme of comfort, luxurious chairs opened wide arms to receive his visitors, fleecy rugs lay on the floor, and heavy curtains hung before the door. Etchings of old Paris by Charles Meryon, whom genius and the world had driven to madness, hung upon the walls.

When Maurice reached Chelsea, it was late in the evening, and Purcell was alone smoking his favourite meerschaum, as was his habit after dinner.

"I'm glad to see you," he said, shaking his visitor's hand warmly, for he felt that here was a

man who suffered more than he by the marriage of the woman they loved.

"And so we are both back," said Maurice, taking a chair at the other side of the fire; "and Sir Lawrence and his bride are in Paris."

Purcell winced and looked across at Fitzmaurice, who was at that instant indulging in a broad smile.

"He hides his disappointment under a mask of indifference," thought Purcell, "he is wise enough not to wear his heart upon his sleeve for the world to peck at. I could have sworn she cared sufficiently for him to have made a sacrifice for his sake; but declining the baronet and his settlements was not, I suppose, to be expected, according to the philosophy of these days."

"What a snug den you have here," Maurice said, breaking on his thoughts somewhat harshly.

"Do you like it?"

"I think it a cosy room."

"By the way have you dined, Fitzmaurice?"

"Yes, thanks, I had dinner just before starting."

"And I have just finished mine. You will find some cigars there on the little table at your right, and there is some bird's-eye on the chimney-piece, so please take your choice and help yourself until we get some coffee."

"Is it to your digestion what cosmetic is to the toilette—a useful aid?"

"Probably, but it has yet a higher advantage to me. Coffee and cognac excite the imagination; a pipe afterwards subdues its vividness, and relieves it of its rough intensity, so that the mind wanders in a pleasant, half-dreamy track, suitable for the weaving of plots and the development of incidents."

"It must be delightful to move in a world of your own creation, if only for an hour or so," said Maurice lighting a cigar.

"Sometimes it is; it's like stepping out of an apartment crowded with disagreeable people into another room where your intimate friends are waiting you to direct their pleasures."

"I wish I could write a novel, but I think I should never have patience to get through it, even if I had the ability."

"I don't know; when one sees the plot being unravelled bit by bit, it becomes intensely interesting."

"But if one could never uncoil it?"

"Then let him not try to write a book. The way I usually manage before beginning work is to get the plot firmly fixed in my mind, then select the *dramatis personæ*, just as a stage-manager selects actors for the cast of a play; afterwards I think a good deal about these people, sometimes when walking, or pretending to listen to some prosy bores, or in bed before sleeping, or on waking in the morning, or if I am restless at night, and all the world is at peace; when I have continued in this way for some time, I become so familiar with my characters that I should not be surprised to meet them in the streets or encounter them some night in a London drawing-room."

"Then it's not true what the *Saturday Review* said about your taking your characters from real life?"

"Well, as the Irishman said——"

"Rather personal," said Maurice laughingly.

"Not at all. Well, as the son of Hibernian soil said, 'Tis, and 't isn't.'"

"Is not that contradictory?"

"Very much. But this is what I mean. All my characters are really taken from life, but when I transplant them into the world of fiction, they become, if not glorified beings, at least idealized,

whilst keeping their old characteristics, just as ghosts are said to retain sufficient semblance of their earthly raiment for identification when revisiting this plane. Here is our coffee."

"I have a good deal of time at present on my hands," said Maurice, "and, as I don't well know how to employ it, I came to ask your advice."

"Well, in a city there are a many ways of killing time."

"But I want to live by it, which makes a difference."

"Exactly, so it does. I would counsel you to read all you can, not newspapers, but books. If you didn't need your spare time to pay, you might study for the bar; it always gives a man a position, but as a profession it is overcrowded, and you would have to spend years in reading blue-books; besides, the chances of its leading to money-making are very doubtful when you have no connection."

"Yes, I have thought of that, and, moreover, it's only some employment for the present I want. As to my future, Sir Lawrence has promised to obtain me a secretaryship, and I know I shall have Mr. Mundella Ryston's interest also. A secretaryship is not bad, or, in other words, it sometimes leads to good things."

"Why not write? If not novels, at least social articles; they pay pretty well, and would serve as a practice."

"I don't quite know what they are."

"Have you never noticed articles in the *Graphic*, or *Illustrated London News*, or the *Globe*? I write for these papers occasionally, and, if you open that portfolio, I daresay you will find a *Globe* with an article of mine. Hand it to me—thanks. Now here is one on the preposition 'If.' I'll just read a paragraph, and you'll see there is nothing in it, yet

it fills a certain space, and is not, perhaps, uninteresting.

"We shall leave out the 'perhaps'—you have written it."

"Thanks; it is charming to hear a friend say so much. 'In spite of the virtue in If, notwithstanding its power for good or evil, it has been treated by grammarians with but little courtesy or justice. They have defined it as a part of speech devoid of signification, declared it to be a middle term of doubtful character, and compared it insultingly to a zoophyte. When the quarrellers of whom the melancholy Jacques tells us were about to proceed to that mortal combat, which so justly and satisfactorily decides the right in every dispute, one of them bethought himself of that little particle. 'If you said so,' quoth he, 'then I said so.' The other disallowed the 'if,' and they shook hands, and became sworn brothers ever afterwards. Therefore concluded this rare clown your 'if' is the only peacemaker: much virtue in 'if.' Not by any blind chance was 'if' written on the doors of Delphi. Its purpose was designedly hidden in order to stimulate intellectual inquiry. It was a seed, from which grew a mighty tree of dispute, with branches waving to and fro of windy and storm-tossed words. It was an acrostic waiting what those interested in this form of mental activity call 'more light,' till the wise man in Plutarch explained it for us, and declared it to be the tripod of truth.'"

"Thank you," said Fitzmurice, "it astonishes me to find how much can be said about such a little word."

"Think over my proposal."

"I will. My letters to Sir Lawrence should help to break me into work. He always wants social news, and sometimes being unable to obtain a

sufficient quantity, I have to draw on my imagination. It pleases him as well; my object is to amuse."

"Just like one of these articles; just like most things written now-a-days; for this generation soars above knowledge to be found in books, all the wisdom it requires comes to it, one would think, by intuition."

"So it seems," replied Fitzmaurice, rising to take his departure.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FITZMAURICE PAYS A VISIT.

WHEN Sir Lawrence and his bride returned to town early in May, Fitzmaurice continued his duties as secretary, and remained in the great house in St. James's Square.

The baronet's habits were little changed by his marriage. Maurice no longer read to him during breakfast, and it was not until mid-day he came into the study, where his secretary had the drafts of answers to various correspondents written, and was ready to acquaint him with the pith of press opinions on topics of importance.

At the two o'clock luncheon, Lady Usher occasionally made her appearance, but not frequently.

Maurice had felt some trepidation at the prospect of their meeting, and of dwelling under one roof with her; this he would have avoided, but that he found it impossible without acquainting Sir Lawrence of his reasons.

To the letter he had written, which revealed to her the clay of which her idol was made, he had

received no answer, nor had he since seen her alone.

Before the wedding, he had managed to avoid her presence without much trouble, but, now they were living in the same house, it was impossible to evade her, and he felt ill at ease at the prospect of their continual meeting. Her manner on the first day of her return, however, set him at rest.

He was crossing the hall when he saw her descend the great stairs. After a second's deliberation, he waited and bowed, she, in the most conventional manner possible, extended her hand, and asked him how he did, with an assumption of calmness she by no means felt. This was the key-note of her manner ever afterwards.

Had she been colder, shown him resentment, nay ignored him, he would have preferred it to the placid disregard she seemed to betray. His vanity was wounded.

"Perhaps she never cared for me, he thought and I may have made a mistake in thinking she was foolish enough to love me. It's wonderful how women soon forget sentiment when substance of this world is held out to them; she is no exception to her sex. She is but following the advice I gave her; I should be satisfied, and I am," he concluded, feeling at the same time he was not.

When they encountered her manner was the same to him as if they had met yesterday for the first time; any chance remarks he made concerning Grantsborough or his past life she listened to complacently, as if his words bore no reference to a time or place which had held interests for her.

It seemed as if she had severed all association with the past, as if she wished to blot out any place he might have held in her memory.

"If she thinks of any foolish words we may have

said or written, I suppose she laughs at them now. So much the better. We don't care to see the tragic side of existence beyond the region of the footlights; comedy is better suited to every day life. It is best she should be as she is," he continued, "all things so far have turned out as I desired, and I am free to make the most advantageous marriage I can, without the reproach of having spoiled another's life. She has behaved more sensibly than I could have believed; 'best for her and best for me,' as the song says."

Mrs. Mundella Ryston had returned to town in February, and he took an early opportunity of calling on her.

The minister's wife received him with a gentleness of manner that might have been mistaken for tenderness. Her grey eyes seemed larger and more lustrous, her face paler than when they had last met. He was glad to see her, and he expressed his feelings.

"Have you been well?" Maurice asked, sitting opposite her.

"Yes, I have, but I have been anxious. Mr. Ryston has been ill, and his state has given me much uneasiness."

"He is better now, I hope."

"He has improved; the doctors say his indisposition has been the result of over work, and I quite agree with them. He would come to town, first because he has some important business to transact, and also because he has great faith in Dr. Warburton's advice, under whose care he has placed himself."

"We have all heard the cabinet has had some difficulties to encounter lately."

"Yes, and he has been much worried. People say men never die for their country now-a-days,

that is a mistake; they serve their sovereign as faithfully with the pen as our ancestors did with the sword, and inch by inch wear out their lives, instead of losing them by one stroke as in the olden times. But in an age of feverish restlessness no count is taken of this, and when men drop off, their losses are seldom felt by the world, because in this century of ability they are supplied by others equally fitted for the posts."

"It is my theory," said Maurice, "that no one is ever missed from life."

"It would be cruel to think so," she made answer, lifting her eyes to his face that she might see whether he spoke in jest or earnestness.

"But many truths are cruel."

"Unfortunately yes; what you assert is true in one way, the world at large seldom misses a life, but never yet has a death occurred but some survivor has felt its loss."

"That is a kind and merciful view to take," he answered, and then added, "but you are always kind and merciful and good."

A warm light stole for a second into her eyes at his words, but vanished almost as soon as it had appeared.

"Tell me about yourself," she said, quickly. "Were you not sorry to come back to town?"

"On the contrary I was rather glad; the country had begun to grow monotonous. I'm afraid I was not in harmony with nature, I don't care much about her."

"I am sorry to hear that, yet I am inclined to agree with you there. I am one of those who prefer candle-light to sunshine, and painted ceilings to azure skies, is it not sad?"

"I don't think it is."

"I fancy it would be difficult for anyone who has

lived through a couple of London seasons to lead a perfectly natural life afterwards."

"I wonder how our first parents would have felt if, when they had a grown-up family and knew the cares of life, they were permitted to re-enter Paradise? I imagine all the fresh delights it afforded in their early days would have vanished, and they have found themselves sadly out of place."

"And you suppose those who have known the world would feel likewise if sent back to nature?"

"I do," replied Fitzmaurice. "Once the bloom is off the peach, it can never be replaced."

"And society I suppose takes off the freshness from our natural lives, that is your moral?"

"Yes," he answered. "You have heard of course Sir Lawrence has been trying to regain the bloom of his youth?"

"Yes, I have heard about his marriage, but it scarcely surprised me."

"He is endowed with a juvenile heart warranted to wear out a couple of lives, could he supply himself with any modern elixir."

"You know Lady Usher of course?"

"Yes," said Maurice shortly.

"I have heard she is young and beautiful."

"She is both," he replied.

"Dear me, I wonder she married him; nothing can atone for the difference in their years."

Maurice remained silent.

"Were it a girl who had been out a couple of seasons, I shouldn't have wondered," continued Mrs. Mundella Ryston, "but in the country, and especially in Ireland, one always believes my sex is unsophisticated in worldly ways, I suppose such a belief is a fallacy."

"I don't think it is," he said. "Lady Usher I am sure knew little of the world."

"Then you think she fell in love with a man old enough to be her grandfather?"

"It is impossible to say."

"You may remember that I wrote I had selected a wife for you," she said, presently, striving to smile as she spoke, but averting her eyes from his.

"I do remember; I have never forgotten anything you have said or written."

"She is an old friend of mine, she has no relatives living, and her income is about four thousand a-year."

"Four thousand a-year," he repeated, as if calculating afresh all its coveted possession would be certain to insure him. With such an annuity, he would be independent of Sir Lawrence's patronage, and to the secretaryship he ardently hoped for; he might get into Parliament if he pleased, or travel, or buy an estate in Ireland, where his income would be regarded as certain wealth.

"She will make an excellent wife," said Mrs. Mundella Ryston.

Her words recalled him from the thoughts in which he was revelling: he had not taken into his calculations the idea of a wife who was to share his future, and it now occurred to him with a chilling effect that banished the brightness from the prospects spread before his mental gaze.

"Are you prepared to marry her?"

"That is a leading question," he answered, evasively, "and one I cannot answer in a minute."

Mrs. Mundella Ryston drew a long breath, and lay back in her chair.

"I know I'm inconsistent," he said; "one day I would do anything or make any sacrifice for money, because it means so much to me, more than you can ever know; the next I fancy that, rather than accept certain circumstances with wealth, I would

rather remain as I am with the hopes, chances, and illusions of life before me."

"Its illusions often brighten our existences," she said.

"Yes, when realities disappoint us," he answered.

"That is true," she said thoughtfully, remembering her past years and all the promises which had proved barren.

Presently she said,

"This is an opportunity such as you may never meet again. My friend is desirous of having some one to share her life, and having confidence in my judgment, she is willing to marry the man I select, provided she does not dislike him. I have chosen you, and you," she added in a lower key, "can make her love you if you wish."

"How can I thank you," he said with gratitude; "it was good of you to have thought of me."

"Did I not say we should always be friends?" Then she added promptly: "It will give me pleasure to see you independent of the world and happy."

He rose suddenly without replying, walked to the window and looked out at the garden with its colourless beds, its solitary lime-tree, its wintry aspect, and then at the sky, dull and lowering. Feeling suddenly depressed, he turned from this sombre view to the room rich with harmonious colouring and ruddy fire-light flickering on soft white rugs. Warmth and beauty seemed to emanate from the woman whose eyes were turned to him enquiringly.

"I think," he said, returning and sitting beside her, "you must decide this question for me whether I am or am not to be married to this well-dowered friend of yours."

"No," she answered, as if some sudden thought

had risen in her mind which she was anxious to crush, "you must decide for yourself."

"I know," he said, "four thousand a-year is not to be had every day, and as you say this is a chance which may come but once in my life, yet I don't feel glad of the prospect or anxious about it as I should. Is it not strange?"

"It is."

"Once, when I heard of men marrying for money, I thought they were the luckiest mortals under the sun, and I envied them; now when such a prospect opens before me I—I don't think myself particularly fortunate."

"We are liable to strange contradictions," she said briefly, but even as she spoke a new light brightened her face with happiness.

"We will let the subject rest for the present," he said as he rose to depart.

She extended her hand in silence, then followed his retreating figure with her eyes until the door closed upon him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LADY EVERFAIR'S GARDEN-PARTY.

LADY USHER was presented at Court by her sister-in-law, the Duchess of Bloomsbury, and under the shelter of her grace's wings was safely launched on the waters of London society.

The duchess declared Lady Usher's manners perfection, and society echoed the opinion.

Lady Usher never offended its ears by an original remark, or made it jealous by the indication of talent, she rarely spoke, was never surprised even

when surprise was not only permissible but advisable, such as at the records of the latest scandals, or the fall of a good name; stranger still, she never expressed violent horror at such revelations, as a score of other women did whose fair fame was neither above suspicion nor reproach.

She was seen everywhere, and Sir Lawrence was ever by her side. He was proud of this young wife, the sovereignty of whose beauty was universally acknowledged, and in his vanity, he wished to show the world the prize he had won.

The calmness of her mind, her passivity to all external things, gave a look of serenity to her eyes, of gentleness to her expression that betrayed neither hope, nor fear, nor gladness, nor despair.

Day followed day, week followed week in a pursuit of pleasure that became monotonous. In the morning there were rides in the Park, followed by luncheons or visits to picture galleries, succeeded in turn by garden parties, afternoon teas, at homes, dinners, balls, attendance at the opera and theatres.

To Lady Usher this kind of existence was a thing apart from her former life, and she wondered how long it would last, or whether she in time would take some interest in the frivolous pleasures, excitements, scandals, and continual chase after novelty which seemingly gave happiness to many other women.

She longed for quiet and rest, that she might accustom herself to the altered condition of her life, and look her future in the face; but, since her wedding-day, change had succeeded change, novelty and excitement had followed close upon each other, and left her no leisure to make peace with her heart.

To her husband she made no murmur. It was his wish she should live in the constant pursuit of pleasure, and she obeyed it with unquestioning placidity; she would have gone with him to the

Antipodes without a dissenting word, had he expressed such a desire. She went out continually, received at the great house in St. James's Square, and became popular.

Mothers lauded her to their daughters as an example of wisdom and obedience because she had married a man who, if old enough to be her grandfather, had the counterbalancing advantages of a splendid rent-roll and a title; daughters pitied her, for though she was far too proud to betray her feelings, they felt she was sad in the midst of gaiety, lonely in the heart of crowds; men, old and young, looked on her with admiration, and were heard to utter strong language over the fact of her being wedded to the ancient baronet.

In June London was astir.

Lady Everfair had taken a villa on the banks of the Thames, for the summer months; a delightful residence that had many historic associations, and could boast of a rose-garden that had been the scene of a royal scandal when George the First was king.

Across the water one caught sight of Pope's Villa, in the grounds of which the poet spoke tender words to Lady Mary Wortley Montague, and Hervey the handsome, powdered, patched, and painted, flirted with the maids-of-honour of Queen Caroline's Court.

The velvet lawn in front of Lady Everfair's picturesque villa sloped down to the water's edge, where a barge was moored, in which the countess had herself rowed on moonlight nights, accompanied by some Bohemian friends who supped and held revelry with her until the dawn of a new day. Here the Countess welcomed her guests one summer day.

Now she had become the sovereign of Bohemia, it was expected she would invite notable people in

connection with art and literature, together with her society friends.

"Bohemians," she had said. "Bohemians are the chosen people."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Frummage, with some satire but much truth, "Good Christians look on them as heathens, good citizens regard them as vagabonds, and I am not sure both Christians and citizens are wrong."

"Nor am I," said Lady Everfair, "but I cannot live without them; they give a colour and flavour to society, they are children of the sun, the champagne of life."

Her doors were always flung open in hospitable welcome to her subjects. She had bidden them to her garden-party, and when the day arrived they were not found wanting.

Nature graciously deigned to smile on the countess's efforts; the sky was cloudless, the air merry with sunshine and heavy with the perfume of June roses, the river turned to molten gold under rays of yellow light.

On one side the lawn stood an awning of striped blue and white, where tea was dispensed, and a constant popping of champagne corks heard; whilst behind a cluster of trees a Hungarian band played Strauss's waltzes and selections from Wagner's opera's. At five o'clock the lawn was crowded by many-coloured, vivacious groups, on enjoyment bent.

Lady Everfair felt the happiest hour of her life had arrived. Three great painters were present, a few notabilities from the House of Commons, half a dozen members of the Upper House, a famous actor, numerous actresses, authors and authoresses, poets and journalists, composers and musicians in abundance.

The Duchess of Bloomsbury, who had come to

stare, remained to be amused; ever dignified, she now became gracious. Sir Lawrence and Lady Usher had driven down Maurice in their landau. Mrs. Lordson and Newton Marrix were accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Marcus Phillips. L'Ambassadrice, famed for her shoulders and her rubies, was attended by her husband, and the marquis who had travelled far and told strange tales.

Rising above the softer passages of music came the happy laughter of merry voices; wit was bandied, compliments fell upon delighted ears, a sense of enjoyment reigned supreme.

Under a cedar-tree on a low garden chair sat a popular authoress. She wrote three novels a year, besides innumerable stories for magazines; she possessed a husband, with whom she was the best of friends when they met for an hour or so once in twelve months.

She had much vanity, some wit, and a pleasant vivacious manner that invariably drew crowds of the opposite sex around her; these she took care to flatter, especially when they happened to be professional critics.

"One must fill one's reviewer with a sense of his own consequence," she said to Richard Purcell, who was laughing over some compliment she had just paid a specimen of the tribe, who had departed with a smile on his face and a sense of delight in his heart caused by her words.

"Yes," he answered, "we hold the honest truth no longer a virtue, but a relic of a barbarous age; dissimulation is one of the signs of culture and civilization."

"That is almost rude," she answered, looking at him coquettishly from under the becoming shade of a Spanish fan she held between her and the sun, with dexterous grace. "Don't you know, lies should

be cultivated and used as an art. I grant you that, like rouge, they should be made use of sparingly and with dexterity, which perhaps practice alone can give; then they relieve the dulness of conversation, as rouge does the pallor of a face." She laughed as merrily as a child at her words.

"I at least have the bad taste to prefer dulness and Nature to lies and rouge," he said.

"How can you use such strong language, Purcell, on such a sunny day as this? Ah! by the way, there is Newton Marrix. Do you know, I heard the other night he became so excited over the *Times*' review of his new book that his friends were obliged to send him home in a cab, and the cabby heard him singing, 'Hard times come again no more.'"

"Oh, for the rarity of Christian charity!"

"Yes, it is rare; charity is never overdone believe me."

"Pray be serious."

"If so I shall be dull, and it strikes me you are much more serious since you returned from Ireland. What has happened? Have you slept in a rath and got stricken by the fairies, or lost your heart and got plagued by melancholy? I don't know which is worse," she said with mock gravity, looking at him in a manner she believed irresistible.

"My heart is sair," he said forcing himself to laugh, and speaking in unison with her mood, lest she should suspect truth lay in his words; "but the laughter of your burlesque has drowned the cry of my tragedy, and so the affairs of my heart, as Voltaire says, 'are of too much consequence to be treated seriously.'"

"You have all my sympathy," she replied, extending her hand to him; he took it, and bent down as if he would place it to his lips, but she snatched it hastily from his grasp.

"By the way," she said; "have you seen Lady Usher? she is standing there talking to Mrs. Mundella Ryston. She has a perfectly lovely face, it's such a pity to see her married to that painted, smiling death's head."

Purcell clenched his hands, and looked in the direction the fashionable authoress indicated.

"Yes, I have seen her," he replied.

"She is some poor curate's daughter I heard," continued the literary lady, "with a whole string of unprovided-for sisters and brothers. One cannot blame her after all; every woman must make the best bargain she can, and hers is not a bad one, I daresay."

"Perhaps not," said Purcell.

Presently she jerked out a little pocket-book, attached to her waist by a silver chain, and with a stumpy piece of pencil began making notes rapidly in a business-like manner.

"An idea has occurred to me; if I didn't put down, it would have been lost for ever," she said; "the day I forget my book, I don't know how much I lose."

"It's your readers who then suffer loss," he answered.

She was pleased, and laughed heartily. "I am fond of giving pictures of society like this," she said, "but I wish I could paint it as I know it to be with all its dark phases, as well as its bright places.

"And can you not?"

"Of course not. Society would reject a faithful portrait as a plain woman would a striking likeness, abhorring it the more because recognising its truth. Ah, here is Mr. Newton Marrix."

Purcell quietly moved away. Presently he joined a group of friends, but soon disengaged himself

from them, for a restlessness had descended on him since he had caught sight of a face seldom absent from his thoughts.

"How fresh and pure, and beautiful she looks amongst all these women. Can it be that she voluntarily sold herself for gold?—no, no, I cannot believe it when I look at her, and I fear she is unhappy."

This thought made him miserable.

"Oh! God," he said, "I would give my life to make her content."

He sat down on a garden seat under lilac-trees; close by he recognised his hostess's voice speaking to Mrs. Lordson.

"And you really admire Mrs. Marks?" said the countess in her sweetest tone.

"Yes," said the American, "she is a fine woman."

"I'm told," continued Lady Everfair, in the same placid voice, "she has dissolving views."

"Ah, now that's real nice," said Mrs. Achilles Lordson eagerly. "At her 'at homes.'"

"Dear no; they will first be seen in the divorce court."

Purcell started to his feet.

"It is always the same," he said, "these women are never satisfied save when tearing each other's character to pieces."

He went down the cedar walk leading to the river, and suddenly came on Lady Usher, who was quite alone. She did not look as he approached, but the first glance he caught of her face filled him with an unspeakable pain he could not explain.

"Lady Usher," he said taking off his hat. She looked up suddenly, and he saw her face brighten.

"Mr. Purcell, I didn't know you were here."

"I see you have not forgotten me."

"I have not, and you remind me of Grantsborough," she said.

"I'm glad," he answered, "I am associated in your mind with pleasant recollections."

She answered him in a voice into which some note of constraint suddenly entered.

"One's home is always a happy memory when one has left it."

"And Grantsborough," he said, "is a charming town. I always think of it as Arcadia."

"I hope we may see you there this year, if we return to Usher Park."

"Does Sir Lawrence intend visiting Ireland in the autumn?"

"I scarcely know yet. I think he has not made up his mind."

But a few yards from them rose a murmur of many voices intermingled with strains of the Hungarian band, and sounds of laughter; but here in the narrow cedar walk was calmness, the tall trees shut them out from the crowd. Side by side they walked to the edge of the water, murmuring amongst the reeds.

"This is Lady Everfair's barge," he said, "she had it built after an old design; the carving at the prow is fine."

"It's handsome, and how smooth the river is, it's like a sheet of gold."

"Would you like to enter the barge?—may I row you up and down, the oars are left in her."

"I should like it much, it would be a change," she said, with a backward look, "from the noise of crowds."

In a second Purcell had untied the rope, and brought the boat to a landing-place from whence they could easily embark. His heart throbbed as

he handed her in, and took his place, facing her; in another moment they were floating with the tide, the waters sparkling like gold, drops falling from the oars glittering like diamonds in the sun.

"It is a relief from the confusion we have left," she said. "I wonder where is the river rushing?"

"Somewhere safe to sea," he answered, "do you remember the lines—

" ' And even the weariest river
Runs somewhere safe to sea. ' "

"Ay, but the sea may be a long way off," she answered, with an air of abstraction as if she had caught another meaning in the words, "and the river may well grow weary before reaching its goal. You are fond of the sailing," she added.

He had been silent, satisfied in looking at her unheeded.

"I am," he said, "it is a symbol of life."

"In what way?" she asked.

"We have all a surface existence, smooth like this river, but like it also there are sometimes depths beneath the world may not see."

"You think each mortal has a double life?"

"Most mortals have; the real and the unreal; the mask and the face."

"Don't be severe upon them, they may be compelled to wear masks."

"Then their courage must be poor if they are afraid to appear as they really are."

"Circumstances are sometimes hard, and make hypocrites. I think we had better go back," she said suddenly, "Sir Lawrence may want me."

He turned the barge, and without speaking, rowed her to the little landing stage.

"I have enjoyed this short row more than anything else to-day," she said, when they landed, "thank you very much."

They had scarcely walked half-a-dozen yards up the cedar walk, when they met Maurice coming quickly towards them."

"Sir Lawrence," he said to Lady Usher, "wishes to know if you are ready; he does not feel well, and is anxious to leave."

"Then let us go at once," she answered hastening her steps.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT DR. Warburton said.

WHEN Lady Usher and Maurice found Sir Lawrence he was already in the carriage awaiting them, leaning back languidly, looking notwithstanding the preservations his valet had employed, as if he had grown suddenly old and haggard.

"I fear my love, I have disturbed you," he said with the graciousness that was part of his nature, "but if you would rather remain you could return with the duchess, and Fitzmaurice and I will drive back."

"No, I had much rather go with you," she answered.

"You are very good my dear, very good. I would not leave but I don't feel quite well, the heat of the day has probably made me ill, and all these strange, noisy people Lady Everfair has gathered around her have given me a headache."

"Are you in pain?" she asked anxiously.

"Pain, not at all," he said loftily, as if pain were to him an impossibility, and its suggestion in

connection with him an offence against good taste. "I am only a little weak; a short rest will quite restore me, quite."

He lay back amongst the cushions of the carriage once more; his eyes from time to time closed, notwithstanding his efforts to keep them open, and his cheeks grew pale under those delicate touches of art which rivalled nature.

The three were silent during the drive to town, heedless of glorious views of wood and pasture-land, and glimpses of the silver Thames sparkling in sunlight, seen twixt tangled boughs, and glades where cattle grazed peacefully.

Arriving at the great house in St. James's Square, the baronet opened his eyes with a start, and getting out of the carriage leaned heavily on the footman's shoulder.

"I shall go into the study my dear, and rest a little," he said to his wife taking Maurice's arm, his light jaunty gait had suddenly deserted him. "I will have some champagne; nothing like it for reviving the spirits—and then I shall rest a little before we go out to dinner. We dine to-night with the American minister; he is a man who will interest you my dear."

"But surely," said Lady Usher, "we won't go unless you are much better?"

"Better, my love, I am not ill, you must be nervous to imagine I am. I feel just a little tired, that is all, and rest will restore me. It was merely the band, and these people that gave me a headache."

"I don't care in the least about going out," she pleaded, seeing he looked wretchedly tired and worn.

"My dear, you say that because you imagine I am not well enough to go; your charming sex always

rushes to conclusions. We shall go, for I always enjoy the American minister's dinners; he selects his people well, that is a study in itself next in importance to the menu. I would not disappoint him on any account.

Sir Lawrence drank some champagne, and felt better, then lay on a couch in the study, propped by cushions, and settled himself for a twenty minutes' sleep, at the termination of which Maurice was instructed to call him.

The secretary however allowed twenty minutes to glide to thirty, and the baronet being in a profound slumber, was then wakened with some difficulty.

"I hope you feel better?" said Maurice.

"Yes," Sir Lawrence replied, walking across the room, "that is—no—I feel rather weak, I hope I haven't got a sunstroke," with a feeble attempt at a smile. The wrinkles in his face deepened and multiplied, his eyes wore a faded, glazed look, the vivid bloom on his face mocked his hollow cheeks.

"Perhaps," said Fitzmaurice, hesitatingly, "before you go out, you would wish to see Doctor Warburton."

"Well, perhaps it would not be amiss if I did, he might look in, and just give me a tonic, a tonic is an excellent thing and often sets a man right in a few minutes. I am perfectly well, but I will see him. You had better send for him."

"Shall I go round and see him?"

"Thank you, that will be better still; and then, if he is in, he might call and see me here in the study quietly; there is no need to alarm my lady with any announcement of his presence, none whatsoever, doctors are not pleasant visitors."

Doctor Warburton lived in an eminently respectable street, near St. James's Square. He regarded himself as a distinguished man and a great physician,

and the world did not dare to differ from him in this opinion. He was a member of several scientific societies, lectured occasionally, and contributed articles to the *Journal of Mental Science*, broaching impossible theories in the prosiest of English.

His wisdom it seemed, encompassed the knowledge of life and death, and no patient ever had the audacity to recover when once the verdict of demise had passed the doctor's lips; for his utterances were regarded as those of an oracle to which Fate herself must submit.

In appearance he was tall, thin, and grave; respectability was written on every line of his colourless face, and eminence was reflected in the smooth, shining surface of his head; his cold blue eyes, into which no ray of frivolity, no light of joy had ever stolen, looked on all who approached him as if he were gravely speculating on their probable length of years.

No speck of dust, no trace of soil had ever dared to rest on the immaculate bosom of his shirt; no wrinkle ever marked his coat, even the very street mud that rose under cab wheels and sportively splashed the common herd of humanity, slunk beneath his tread, not daring to stain the brilliant lustre of his patent leather boots. His patients liked him for the stern solemnity of his manners and the grave expression of his countenance. Solemnity they said, befitted a man who held the keys of health in his hands and could return a verdict of death in a sentence.

In the study where Sir Lawrence awaited him, he seemed graver than ever, as if in contrast to the baronet's airy and gracious manner.

"My dear doctor," said the latter elevating his eyebrows to the curve representing a smile. "How do you do; you were quite at leisure I hope, for

really there was scarce a necessity to send for you professionally, though I am always delighted to see you socially, always."

"Pulse rather slow," replied Dr. Warburton, as sternly as if Sir Lawrence had not made him a pretty speech, and paid him a polished compliment. He held the baronet's thin hand in his own, and let his eyes rest on the second hand of his watch.

"The fact is," said Sir Lawrence, "I have been down to Richmond at a garden-party to-day, the sun is strong, especially on an exposed lawn, and there was much noise, music, and talking, going on and a lot of strange people, very strange people present, I think it quite upset me. I really think it did."

"Rather weak," said Dr. Warburton.

"Exactly my dear sir. When we came back I felt exhausted talking so much, I suppose, and conversation is no longer an art. I took a nap and Mr. Fitzmaurice thought I had better have a tonic, which you will be good enough to prescribe for me before we go out to dinner."

"You will have to keep quiet," said the doctor briefly.

"Really," replied the baronet, who was extremely nervous during the interview, and maintained his airy conversation for the purpose of quieting his serious fears.

"Yes, you cannot go out to dinner to-night."

"Ah my dear sir, it's an engagement of a month's standing, and I cannot disappoint my host, nor indeed my lady."

"Then Sir Lawrence, if you go I shall no longer regard you as my patient," and the great man, indignant at this unwonted contradiction, made a movement as if he considered the interview had ended. The baronet at once became uneasy.

"My dear doctor," he said, "you take my words

too literally. If you really wish me to remain at home, of course I shall submit."

"The action of your heart is extremely weak. Nothing wrong," he added quickly, seeing the look of fright which crossed the baronet's face and gave it a pitiful scared look, which neither paint nor powder nor cosmetic could hide. "You will have to rest, take a light dinner, and avoid excitement of any kind. I will have a draught made up and sent round, and I shall call and see you in the morning."

"Thanks," said Sir Lawrence; all attempts at a smile were failures, his eyebrows remained in their proper position.

The doctor shook hands with him as gravely as if bidding him an eternal farewell, and departed with a tread almost as noiseless as that of death himself.

"Dr. Warburton has just been here," Sir Lawrence said to his young wife, when presently she came down dressed for the ministerial dinner, "and he says I must rest my dear, and not go out. There is nothing the matter with me—just a little fatigue, but these men are more autocratic than emperors, and they know we must be more obedient to them than serfs to their lords, for we cannot do without doctors, and we can without emperors. I am sorry my dear to disappoint you, really sorry, but it cannot be helped. I have just sent Jones with a note to the minister."

"I am glad that we are not going," she answered. "I saw you were too tired."

He looked at her gratefully.

"You are more than good," he said.

In the morning Sir Lawrence was up betimes, but did not feel strong enough to leave his dressing-room. He would not permit the doctor to see him in his night-cap, and without the accessories of his toilette,

and therefore awaited the great man, arrayed in a crimson velvet dressing-gown and wearing a juvenile wig.

The pink blinds in the room were half drawn, and in the bright light of this June morning the baronet's face looked yellow, haggard, and aged. A day or an hour sometimes makes an epoch in a life, and it seemed as if Sir Lawrence had suddenly arrived at the turning-point of his existence on the day he had attended Lady Everfair's garden-party.

When Dr. Warburton arrived, the baronet rose to receive him with his usual graciousness, but the medical man's grave, chill air depressed him; this reserved, solemn man was out of place on this gay summer morning, when Nature was glorified by sunshine, and happiness held sway over the land.

"Why cannot the man smile?" said the baronet to himself; "one would think he carried a death mandate in every pocket, or was haunted by the ghosts of his deceased patients."

The doctor felt the baronet's pulse, and then examined him.

"You are somewhat better to-day," he said, "but I would advise you Sir Lawrence, to leave town as soon as you can—immediately, if possible."

"My dear doctor, leave town in the middle of the season?"

"With rest and quiet you may live for years," continued the doctor ignoring the baronet's last remark.

"Live for years?" said Sir Lawrence with astonishment. "Why, of course I intend to live for years."

"And I hope you may fulfil your intentions," said the medical man, in a tone implying "But I much doubt it," then he added—"Change and rest will gain you vitality, but you must leave town."

"Ah doctor," said the baronet, pathetically, "you are a hard master, where shall I go? We have only just come from abroad."

"Why not go to Ireland?"

"My dear sir it is so dull."

"But dulness is necessary to your condition."

"There is no answering your arguments; one must obey them."

The doctor bowed, his face remained passive as that of a statue.

When he had taken his way slowly and softly downstairs, Lady Usher knocked at her husband's dressing-room door.

"What did the doctor say?" she asked when she had entered.

"That I was better my love; but as usual Warburton is arbitrary, he insists on my keeping quiet."

"Surely you will obey him," she remarked.

"Yes, but he orders me out of town."

"Yes," she answered.

"Are you not disposed to rebel against such a sentence my dear?" asked Sir Lawrence.

"No."

It was all the same to her where they went, she had no choice.

"He has ordered me to Ireland; dulness, he says, will cure me; strange remedy. However, early in the autumn we can ask some people over, it will be a distraction to both of us, and prevent you feeling lonely."

"When do we go?" she asked.

"As soon as you are ready."

"I shall be ready at any time."

"Then perhaps the sooner the better. But I feel it quite selfish to take you away from town in the middle of the season, it is really too bad, and this your first season," said the baronet kindly.

"I am satisfied," she replied listlessly.

"Well we shall take our revenge next year, and be the gayest people in town from May to August."

"Perhaps," said Lady Usher.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CORPORAL'S SWEETHEART.

It was early in the morning, and the Corporal was working in Ulic Fitzmaurice's garden in front of the cottage. The sky was clear and bright, June sunlight lay full upon the distant mountain, chequered now and then by patches of purple shadow from the passing clouds; young corn, forcing its way through earth, clad the wide fields with hues of tender green.

The river rushing through the old brown weir, and rippling past the rush-covered island, could be heard distinctly in the silence, broken only by its sound and the songs of birds in woods and hedgerows.

The Corporal, attired in his sleeved waistcoat, and wearing his cap jauntily on one side his head, clutched a spade in his hand, with which he was digging new potatoes. From the garden a view of the road, thick and white with dust, was obtainable; now and then the Corporal resting from his labours glanced backwards and forwards to see if chance had sent a neighbour in his way with whom he might enjoy pleasant gossip.

This morning however there were no stray passengers, and the broad road seemed deserted; there-

fore for want of a better companion, he was obliged to hold conversation with himself.

"An' grand potatoes they are, though it's I that says it, that oughn't," he remarked; and then, looking up, he suddenly added, "An' I'm blest, if this isn't Mary Bryan on the road; sure it is, there's ne'er a girl in Grantsborough but herself could step out like that anyhow."

Mary Bryan was Miss Dailey's cook and confidential servant, a woman of about thirty-four, with a broad, bright, good-humoured face always on the verge of bursting into smiles, like buds into blossom; her hair was black and rippling, her cheeks rosy, her eyes dark, her teeth white as pearls.

She was suspected of cherishing a tender regard for the Corporal, for whom "she had always the pleasant word," and he was certainly smitten by her charms. Catching sight of her, he hastily adjusted his cap, tied the coloured cotton handkerchief round his neck into a knot, gave a broad smile and went down to the garden gate to await her. He had no doubt she was coming to order vegetables; for his potatoes were always the best and earliest in the market, his cabbages the whitest, both of which he sold at a good price, and by this means added considerably to the comforts of his "honour."

"An' there you are Misther Casey," said Mary Bryan approaching him.

The prefix "O" to her surname had been lost or mislaid during troubles consequent to the downfall of her family, "that was always dacent," and had given a colonial bishop to the Church in its palmy days.

"Devil a lie in your words; an' it's glad t' see you I am this fine mornin'."

"You might say, 'thanks be t' God,' an' be none the worst for it aither," she replied laughingly.

"Sure, it's always sayin' me prayers I am, when I see you, only you don't hear me, an' thankin' God for havin' made you such a fine woman!" replied the old soldier, gallantly.

"Well, it's yerself that have the fine, smooth tongue anyhow. Sure it's the solgers are always able to turn poor girls' heads with their nonsense, an' then break their hearts after, the decateful crew."

"Oh, then, 'twould take a wonderful tongue entirely to turn your head, I'm thinkin', or—or—t' touch your heart, 'tall at 'tall," he said, looking with a droll expression at her round pleasant face.

"Now, I'm ashamed at you, Misther Casey, to talk like that," she said, looking up and down the road to see if anyone was coming.

"Bedad, it's thrue," he said. "Sure, I've been tryin' meself this many a day t' touch yer heart, an' I might as well be idle; I was only wastin' me labour for nothin'."

Mary Bryan gave a loud, hearty laugh, well pleased at his words.

"Well, it's yerself is the fine schemer," she replied, "keepin' me here talkin' and wastin' me time this fine mornin', an' the world an' all afore me to do."

"I'm blest," said the Corporal, "but I'd be well satisfied to waste the remainder o' me days in the same way."

"G'lang, you play-boy," she answered with a look of mock reproach that would have made the fame of a comic actress. "If you cared for me the laste thing in the world, sure, you'd have come to ould Mrs. Pendher's wake, God be good t' her, where I'd have had time t' hear you instead o' listenin' t' yer nonsense in the mornin'; but sure, Mr. Walsh, the p'liceman was there instead, a fine young man he

is, an' wan that knows how to make himself agreeable to the ladies."

She tossed her head in fine scorn, at the same time watching the effect of her words out of the corners of her great dark eyes.

"The devil a bit o' me ever knew ould Kitty was dead until she was buried; sure she took long enough to die, an' then went off in a suddent afther all; an' it's meself would have gone t' the wake, an' walked every fut o' the way an' twice as far, for the chance o' meetin' yerself there."

"It's aisy for you to say that now," she said, unrelentingly, "sure, all the town knew that she was dead, an' 'twas the elegant wake she had, an' there was plenty o' fun at it."

"Sure you'll make me teeth water," said the Corporal, "if you tell me any more about it, an' I not there."

"Go away with you now, Misther Casey, it's the wonder t' me you didn't know of it, an' you always so fond o' the bit o' chat."

"Ay, but I wasn't in town for the past fortnight."

"Sure, a week afore she died I met her son Jim, an' he says t' me, 'I hope the mother won't die anyhow till after the fair day an' I've sowld the black horse, for if she don't it's the fine wake I'll give her, an' a grand high mass, but if she goes afore that time, sure, I can't give her that, for Father Doran won't give me credit like the shopkeepers.' But the ould woman lived till three days after the fair, an' it's the fine wake Jim gave her, an' a grand high mass, with twelve priests an' no less."

"An' be the same token," added the Corporal, "it's the grand dinner-party Father Doran gave that day week to half the priests in the parish, sure I supplied them with vegetables."

"Whist, if you talk like a black-mouthed Prodes-

dant, I'll have nothing to do with you, it wouldn't be lucky."

"I'll be anythin' in the world you like, if you'll only give me the pleasant word," he said drawing near her, and putting out his arm to clasp her waist, but she, quickly drawing back with a merry laugh, said,

"Now, Mither Casey behave yerself. I'm losin' me time an' forgettin' me business entirely in listenin' t' you."

"Troth, if you'd only listen to me for ever I'd make you forget the cares o' life," he said in an earnest tone.

"Well," she replied, drawing a step nearer to him. "Yer tongue is so sweet 'twould charm the birds off the bushes an' steal the heart out o' any girl."

"Let me give you a kiss for them words," he said.

"Go away with you now," she replied.

And before she had time for further protestations the gallant soldier had kissed her.

"It's yourself that have the impitence," she said, her dark eyes sparkling and her cheeks turning red as June roses, "an' now let me get what I came for an' go me way."

"I'll give you anything in the world, me darlin', if you only tell me what it is."

"Well, it's some parsley I've come for; the rector an' Mrs. Rochford are goin' to dine with us to-day."

"You'll have the choicest bit in the place," he said.

They walked round the spot which by a stretch of courtesy was called a garden, where rhubarb, cabbages, potatoes, lettuce, and cauliflowers flourished under the Corporal's excellent care.

"I'll get you a nice bit, an' sure it's not be-grudging it I'd be to the ladies," said the Corporal.

"Yer mighty p'lite," said Mary Bryan, "an' is it thrue Sir Lawrence is comin' home; I heard from Miss Kennedy last night that he was."

"Thru as daylight," answered the Corporal, with one of his broad smiles.

"Sir Lawrence they say is ill, but he never looked well as long as I remember, though he was always wonderfully young in himself; an' sure I'll look as well meself when I'm a month in me coffin as he did on his weddin' day."

"Ah, Mary Bryan, I hope you'll never make any man wait for you till he's as ould as Sir Lawrence."

"Ah then if he did I'd never have him at all; sure wan might as well marry a skeleton on wires; an' them is the words I said when I see him beside Miss Madge comin' out o' church that mornin'."

"Well, t'was a wonderful match, you might have knocked me down with a straw when I first heard it, that you might."

"We always thought," said Mary Byran, who, like all her sex, took great delight in gossip having marriage for its subject, "that she was fond o' Masther Maurice, an' sure the ladies always settled that 'twould be a nice match."

"Well, I always thought so meself," said the Corporal contemplatively, "but there was something in her marriage I could never rightly understand."

"Maybe herself an' Masther Maurice fell out," said this daughter of Eve, "an' she may have married Sir Lawrence just in a pout."

"Well, I hardly know," replied the Corporal. "Masther Maurice didn't seem surprised or angry

aither when he heard of her marriage; but I never could get anything out of him; an' when he didn't want to tell you a thing you might as well ask questions o' the wall."

"But maybe 'twas she broke it off with Masther Maurice when Sir Lawrence proposed to make her me lady, an' give her a car'ge an' pair to ride in every day of her life," said Mary Bryan sagely.

"Bedad, an' maybe ye're right, sure, it's the way with the women always, they'll throw wan man off as ready as an ould glove if they get a better chance."

"Oh, you're an ould decaver, you flatther us wan minute an' give yerself the lie, an' abuse us the next," she said with scorn in her eyes, and a smile on her lips.

"Sure, I never said you'd do it, me darlin'; you're the exception to your lovely sex."

"Well, yer tongue rubbed the blarney stone, there's no doubt o' that."

"Ay, an' me lips touched something sweeter this mornin'."

"But it's yerself is ever ready with your words."

"An' I'll be ready with them at the altar any day you like," said the Corporal.

"G'lang with you now, I must be off," she said, and she ran down the pathway and was out at the gate in another minute, leaving Casey in the garden as lone as Adam before the creation of Eve.

CHAPTER XXX.

UNTO THIS LAST.

TOWARDS the end of June Sir Lawrence arrived at Usher Park. He was not the same man who had left it on his wedding day four months ago. Some change had come he had not foreseen, and was not willing to recognise.

Seated beside his young wife he drove about Grantsborough, his shrunken figure packed in a thickly-padded coat, his hollow cheeks artistically rouged, a gracious smile upon his lips.

He received the congratulations and compliments of his friends with his usual urbanity, said he had come to stay with them a few months, having such pleasant recollections of last year, the place was so charming, and he required just a little rest after the fatigues of his continental tour.

"The air of this place is so fresh, it is sufficient to give a man new life," he said to Dr. Fowler.

"Certainly, Sir Lawrence," replied the little man, whose figure had grown to resemble a barrel set on two short thick legs.

"Mortality is not great in the town doctor."

"By no means," said Dr. Fowler, who understood his patient thoroughly.

"And you say," continued the baronet, more seriously, "that I have positively no organic disease."

"None whatsoever. You are quite sound. Your heart is a little—just a little feeble, that is all."

"Surely that is not much," replied the baronet with an air of relief and a show of bravery he did not quite feel. "I have known men with heart disease who have lived long lives and died in the end of some common-place fever."

"Exactly," said the doctor running his fat forefinger between his thick neck and his collar, as if to give himself more room to breathe. "Just my experience; there are few persons whose hearts are quite healthy."

"Dear me," said the baronet who was not indisposed to thank Heaven for a fact which brought the bulk of humanity on a physical level with himself.

"It is quite true."

"And I have the prayers of the poor," said Sir Lawrence presently, "that will help me, I have no doubt; I don't know if you believe in the benefit of prayers."

"Certainly, certainly," replied the little man who had never given the matter a thought in his life, and to whose thoroughly materialistic nature spiritual hopes were but idle dreams.

"I believe," said the baronet, "there is a certain magnetic force often conveyed to men by the good or ill-will of the people, when united for a common purpose, which acts in some mysterious way on those to whom it is directed for their weal or woe. You may remember the magicians in olden times made waxen images of their enemies, and melted them before the fire. That was merely a form which helped to concentrate their minds and intentions on the object of their enmity; it was the force of their wills which wrought the evil. It is a matter not usually understood; now, I quite believe the combined good wishes—which are the prayers—of the poor will benefit me much."

"No doubt," said the doctor, wondering if the baronet had softening of the brain, but quite ready to agree with him in all things.

"And I flatter myself the people like me," continued the baronet.

"They certainly do," replied the doctor.

"I hope so. I may live for years."

"Most certainly. I shall be much surprised if you don't."

"Thank you, my dear sir. I think I will take a little rest now," said Sir Lawrence.

When Dr. Fowler had left, Lady Usher came into the room.

"The doctor has just been to see me, my dear," he said. "He declares there is nothing wrong with me; he is a very intelligent man, indeed for a young man remarkably intelligent, and he understands my case thoroughly—thoroughly."

"I am glad of that," she answered.

When Sir Lawrence did not drive he spent a great part of the day walking about the grounds and gardens, now a blaze of colour under the June sun, and fragrant with a hundred mingled odours. He invariably carried a cane, which he swung with an airy grace, as if disdaining its intended use.

He was usually accompanied either by his wife or Fitzmaurice, who now seemed more useful than ever. When Lady Usher was beside him, Sir Lawrence was at his brightest and best; he made it his study she should perceive no difference in his manner from when he was in perfect health. Before her, he was high-spirited and smiling; her presence seemed to bring out the gracious points in the character of this fine gentleman of the old school. He was still in love with her, the sight of her eyes filled him with pleasure; the subtle refinement her every movement thought and word displayed, her

innate grace, her natural elegance, gave him keen delight; in return he strove to break down the barriers which age had cruelly placed between them or, that being impossible, to gild them with graciousness of speech, and hang them with the choicest flowers of courtesy, that she might not look upon them with pain.

She had not given him the love she might have bestowed on a younger man, but she never revealed to him by word or look that she had made a sacrifice, and for this he felt a gratitude which was only equalled by his love.

In the early days of July Sir Lawrence grew better. The weather was bright and glorious; lambs bleated in meadows thick with yellow buttercups and star-eyed daisies; corn slowly turned from green to gold, haymakers were busy in the fields, dog-roses and sweet-scented woodbine bloomed in lanes, wild strawberries ripened in hedges, orchard-trees grew heavy with promises of fruit, woods were thick with leaves, the air was filled with music of birds' songs, and at night a young moon rose in the purple sky, turning the waters rushing through the old brown weir to silver.

Under the influence of this weather Sir Lawrence seemed to regain health.

"I never knew nature was so fine," he said to Lady Usher, as if speaking of a picture or a piece of china; "it is quite charming, when one comes to know it, and I think after all, we lose a great deal by remaining in town, running from one crowded salon to the other, while such scenes await our admiration."

"There is nothing so beautiful as nature," she answered.

"Taken in moderation my dear, like wine or other good things in life," he said, not quite willing

to accept this broad statement. "Nature is very fine, I grant you, but art comes as a relief now and then."

"Yet art can never speak to one as nature does, or like her enter into our moods, and be glad and sorry with us by turns."

"What art or nature is to a man or woman depends wholly on his or her character. I once knew a young man who declared he hated nature, and persisted she had not in all her scenes anything to compare with one of Turner's sunsets."

"There are some men and women born without souls."

"Very probably. By the way, I think we might ask the Millfords to dinner some day soon," he said as if talking of those born without souls in some way reminded him of the lord-lieutenant of the county and his family.

"Are you well enough to receive them?"

"I am quite well, besides, there will only be four of them to entertain, and we must take our neighbours piecemeal, another day we shall ask some of the others, it will be a means of distraction to us."

"For what day shall I ask them?"

"Well say this day week; were we asking people to dine with us at St. James's Square, I should say this day month, but here a little time, like a little money, goes a great way."

This conversation took place in Lady Usher's boudoir late at night, and when it ended, Sir Lawrence rose to depart.

"Good night my love," he said, kissing her forehead. "You are looking pale, you must take more exercise."

By the baronet's desire the small apartment next his bed-room, formerly used as a study was

fitted for Maurice, whom he wished to sleep there. There was a strange mixture of bravery and nervousness in Sir Lawrence's character, and his desire to have his secretary within call of him betrayed fears easy to understand.

Maurice had frequently during the night or early morning opened the door communicating with the baronet's apartment to see if he required the opiates or concoctions standing in rows of coloured bottles on the chimney-piece of his room. Sir Lawrence seldom disturbed him, as he carried his courtesy into the smallest considerations of life.

It chanced on the morning succeeding the night the baronet had spoken to Lady Usher regarding the dinner party, Maurice woke early. He looked at his watch and saw it was four o'clock.

A pale yellow light crept into the blue misty sky, birds were twittering softly in the garden underneath his window as if not yet awake; in the farm-yard at a distance he could hear the cock crowing loud and shrill. Putting on his dressing-gown, he crossed the room and softly opened the door covered with crimson baize dividing his apartment from Sir Lawrence's.

By the cold, uncertain light stealing through the curtains he saw the baronet was quietly sleeping, he was therefore about to withdraw softly when casting a second glance at the bed, he discovered he had made a mistake, for Sir Lawrence's eyes were open. He advanced, but, before attempting to speak, an unnatural look in the face resting on the pillow startled him, his heart stood still in horror, then he extended his hand and placed it above Sir Lawrence's heart. As he did so he recoiled at the touch of a body cold as marble; the baronet was dead.

There he lay in the pale mysterious light that

had not yet gained a victory over night and darkness, his wrinkled face white and shrunken, his head from which the auburn wig had been removed, half covered by a night cap from whose tapering top a tassel hung with grotesque effect: his open eyes had a glazed fixed look in them as if they beheld some awful vision on which mortal gaze might never rest, his mouth bereft of its false teeth was sunken and hollow, one thin hand lay stiff and outstretched on the counterpane.

Stripped of powder and paint, corset and padding, false teeth and hair, he looked a poor pitiful miserable thing; the subtle spirit, the mysterious spark which once animated him had fled, and he would smile and laugh, make pretty speeches, and be gracious and gay nevermore.

Never another sun should he see rise or sink, never should he look on the world which had given him so much, never see the familiar faces or hear the pleasant voices of those who had brightened his days; for him the dread veil parting two worlds had been lifted, and he had passed into the lone land of silence and mystery.

A little lamp, whose yellow flame flickered dimly in the growing light, stood on a table beside the bed, and this Maurice, on recovering his first shock, held above the fixed white face; its garish light glittered in the glassy eyes, but they never flinched from its rays; then he held a small mirror which he took from the dressing-table, above the half-opened mouth, but removing it there was no sign of moisture on its surface.

"He must have been dead some hours," thought Maurice, who shuddered involuntarily when reflecting how near death had been whilst he slept; "there is no use in mortal aid now, he has started on a long journey where no

living man may follow him. I suppose I shall have to break the news to Lady Usher."

Suddenly at the mention of her name, a fresh train of thoughts passed rapidly through his mind making his heart beat with unwonted quickness. Her husband being no more she was free to marry again, free to marry him, her first love.

He sat down beside the bed where the dead man lay thinking of this idea which had seized possession of his brain. She was free to marry, and she had loved him, he had no doubt of that, though no word or action of hers had revealed it since the day he had advised her to become Sir Lawrence's bride; her principles, of course forbade her to give indication of her feelings whilst she was a wife. All doubts he ever entertained of her not loving him now faded away, and left his mind in the unclouded certainty of possessing her affection. But a few months ago he was her lover, and there was always he thought a loyalty in woman's nature that kept her true to her first romance.

She had assumed an air of indifference to him in her married life, but doubtless that was to guard her against lapsing into familiarity with him which might prove dangerous. He had always liked her, had ever been her friend, and now the reward of his friendship in advising her to secure wealth and position by marrying the baronet was at hand, and he would reap the benefit of his wisdom.

The more embittered she might have felt against him, the more it indicated her love, the readier she would be to forgive him. Had he not been generous he could have married or become engaged to her, but he had voluntarily abandoned such a project, that she might gain by it—and he added—that he might further himself likewise, but of course she was not aware such a motive actuated him.

"There is no man but keeps some things hidden from his wife, and she need never know of the consideration which made me advise her to marry," he said with a smile. "Of herself she will never suspect it, for love is blind."

His hopes rose whilst the sun gradually crept into the sky and forced its light through the heavy curtains drawn across the window, chasing dim shadows from the room, and falling softly on the figure of the dead man lying with one thin hand outstretched, as if to welcome death. Maurice looked at him steadily, but there was neither pity nor sorrow in his glance; his mind was too much occupied with himself and his future prospects to spare room for any good or generous sentiment.

The baronet's reign was over, and could no longer influence his, Maurice's, life, and he must therefore look to the future and see what luck it held for him.

"I wonder how much he has left her?" he said regarding the waxen face that would never smile again. "The rector would have no settlement made, according to his Quixotic notions such a transaction was like fixing a price on his daughter, he trusted to the bridegroom's generosity for her future. I wonder what Sir Lawrence has left her."

As he rose his eyes fell on the old escritoire of carved oak, standing at the far end of the apartment, in which he knew the baronet kept his private papers. The keys were in the lock. Without a moment's hesitation he crossed the room, laid back the heavy flap of the cabinet, and looked at the row of little drawers before him, in the centre of which was a small square door, with a strangely shaped bronze handle. This he opened quickly; it contained a few old letters, faded by time.

Taking up these letters one by one, he saw at the

bottom of the compartment a small piece of brass about an inch square let into the wood; this with some hesitation and nervousness he touched, when immediately the board gave way, and revealed a small aperture where lay two papers folded like documents and tied with narrow red tape.

"One of these must be his will," he said, looking round timidly. All was quiet in the room, the silence of death brooded in the air, the little lamp still burned by the bedside, its flame throwing flickering rays on the livid face set in the awful seal of eternal repose.

He stepped swiftly to the door, and turned the key in the lock. No one could disturb him now without warning; then he crept back over the carpeted floor, so softly that he could not hear the sound of his own footfall, and stood once more before the *escritoire*.

He took up one of the folded documents, and undid the red tape, then laid it suddenly down again, his hands trembled, and a feeling of icy coldness crept over him, as if it had been communicated by the touch of the inanimate clay lying between the shroud-like sheets beyond; then he started at the thought that flashed through his mind, "what after all if the baronet were not dead, what if he rose up, glided behind him, looked over his shoulder, and witnessed the dishonourable action he was about to commit?"

He forced himself to look round once more, half expecting to see the bed empty, and a thin shrunken figure, standing near him in the dim room, but instead, his eyes rested on the outline of that motionless form, and on the half-open fixed eyes from which light had gone for ever.

Maurice smiled grimly at the strange thoughts his nervousness had conjured and strengthened until

they became almost reality, he then opened the sheet of foolscap quietly. He glanced at the lines of thick heavy writing, giving endowments to local charities, bequests to servants and others, ran his eyes quickly down the paper until he came to the words, "to my secretary, Maurice Fitzmaurice, the sum of £500, and to my beloved wife"—here he drew a quick breath—"the sum of six thousand a year during the period of her life, to be derived from the Ballyrogan property."

He laid down the will; his heart beat rapidly, a smile of satisfaction came on his face. He looked at the date of the document, and saw it had been drawn up in the first week of Sir Lawrence's marriage by his London solicitor whilst he was passing through town on his way to the continent.

"Six thousand a year is not bad for a young and beautiful widow," he said with an air of triumph. "Ah, Madge you were always a charming girl, and it will not be my fault if you wear your weeds longer than twelve months."

He folded the will carefully, tied it with its narrow red tape, and opened the second paper.

"What can this be?" he said curiously, "perhaps a codicil." To his surprise he saw it was a second will dated three months later than the first. In a minute he seemed to have mastered its details, to have taken them in at one rapid glance, the same amounts left to servants and charities, the same sum to himself, but "to my beloved wife I bequeath one thousand pounds yearly, to be derived from the Ballyrogan property."

He read the words over and over again, as if he could not believe his sight, or realise the sense of that written before him in a round, bold hand with every letter carefully formed, and plain as if printed.

The air of triumph vanished, the satisfied smile left his lips, his face grew pale.

"This later will must hold good, and it deprives her, deprives me of five thousand pounds a year at one blow," he said.

He set down the paper, spread it before him, and read it once again in a more careful and leisurely way.

"Sir Lawrence thought she would marry again, and did not desire to endow her future husband. Is a thousand a year sufficient compensation for the sacrifice she has made of her youth and happiness," he asked forgetful he had desired and advised the sacrifice at which he now felt indignant. "Certainly not. When once he had willed her six thousand a year, he had no right to change his mind; the sum is as fairly due to her as if the deed were drawn up in payment of a business transaction; the later will had no power to alter it, and must not, shall not stand in her way."

All signs of nervousness now vanished; the lines about his mouth hardened, and a look of strength and resolution settled in his eyes.

"I shall destroy it," he said determinedly.

He walked to the bed-room door and listened, no sound was audible, then averting his face from the bed and that which lay upon it, he took the little lamp, and went back to the escritoire.

As he passed a large mirror on one of the tables, he caught sight of his own face, and started at the reflection as if he had seen a ghost.

His features were pale and set, his thick hair dishevelled, his lips pressed together and drooped at the corners, his complexion was livid seen in the garish light of the new-born day, an expression rested in his eyes from which he shrank.

He did not linger before the picture, but hastened

to the fireplace and set the lamp down; then without pausing, took the second will and held it over the flame.

In a second it had kindled to a blaze. Placing it under the grate, he watched the fire creep gradually over it, until every inch of the paper was consumed, and had turned to cinders on which the heavy writing came out in black letters exaggerated in size against a background of fiery red gradually changing to grey and black. Then he carefully distributed the ashes, that there might be no trace of his deed.

Presently he put back the first will in its place, closed the compartment, laid the old letters over the spring, and locked the *escritoire*. Then quickly and carefully, he placed the lamp on the little table near the corpse, unlocked the door, and turned towards his own bed-room.

He glanced round when he came to the threshold, and looking towards that ghastly, immovable face on which the grey pallor rested, smiled faintly.

"Dead men tell no tales," he said; then he went back to bed.

Soon the full light of day came into the dead man's room. Outside the sun rested on myriads of flowers that shook the dew from their petals and rejoiced in the light of a summer morning; birds that had twittered in the early dawn burst into clamorous song. Nature exulted in this birth of a new dawn that made the world young once more.

In the baronet's chamber reigned silence and death.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IL EST MORT.

AT eight o'clock it was the custom for Musier, the baronet's French valet, to bring his master a cup of coffee prepared by Monsieur Gravie; and a few minutes after the great clock in the stable-yard had struck that hour, Maurice, who not having slept since his return to bed, anxiously awaited what might happen, heard Musier rap at Sir Lawrence's bed-room door and open it quietly. A pause ensued, suddenly broken by an exclamation from the valet, followed by a rush to Maurice's room.

"Monsieur! monsieur!" the Frenchman called out, pale with fright and breathless with excitement.

Maurice opened his eyes and started suddenly as from a dream.

"Oh! monsieur, il est mort, *il est mort!*"

Maurice sprang from his bed and hurriedly entered the next room, looking white and shocked, stared at the dead man, and then in a voice choked with emotion, said:

"It is all over. Poor Sir Lawrence!"

The next eight days took tardy flight. Blinds were drawn, doors opened and closed noiselessly, servants spoke in whispers, and walked softly, as if fearing to awaken him whose eyes death had sealed; in one locked chamber something lay whose presence seemed to pervade every corner of the mansion, and carry with it dreary solemnity.

Lady Usher had not received the news without a

shock; it was broken as gently as possible by Maurice, who carefully refraining from all expressions of sympathy for her loss, referred to the deceased in eulogistic terms.

There was neither gladness in her heart at sense of her freedom, nor regret for her loss; the indifference which had seared her nature was not to be thawed in an hour. Pain or joy she believed must henceforth be strangers to her; neither could life nor death restore the past; she had done with happiness, parted from her youth; the future was all a blank.

Sir Lawrence had been kind and generous, and missing the familiar sight of his face, the sound of his voice, she felt as she might have had at the departure of some old acquaintance with whom want of sympathy and age had prevented her establishing friendship.

When her father spoke to her of resignation, she listened to him patiently and uninterruptedly, feeling that there was no need for his words.

Her mother, who had established herself in the great house during these days, took a practical view of the situation, and was placidly cheerful when alone with her daughter.

"Dear Sir Lawrence," she said, "was the most estimable of old gentlemen, but one saw he could not be spared long. Have you any idea Madge dear, what jointure he has left you?" she inquired, with an eye to business, which her regrets did not dim.

"None," my lady answered frigidly.

"Your father who in some matters has ridiculous notions, declined the offer of a settlement before marriage."

"I know that, and respect his motives," the young widow replied, in a tone yet more rigid.

"Of course," the elder lady continued, "they were high-minded, and Sir Lawrence was the man to appreciate such delicacy, and not allow you to suffer in consequence. I feel quite impatient until the will is read."

The baronet's lawyer had already taken possession of his papers.

Some distant cousins, who, like birds of prey, had scented death from afar, arrived at Usher Park House attired in mourning, with countenances in which sham sorrow and greedy eagerness struggled for mastery.

Lord Westcentral, the Duchess of Bloomsbury's son, was expected daily, Sir Lawrence's other nephew, son to his deceased and only brother, heir to the baronetcy and property, was in America. When last heard of, he was at the Rocky Mountains, and it was fervently hoped he would never return by those next-of-kin.

There was no inquest. Sir Lawrence had died from disease of the heart, and Dr. Fowler won golden opinions regarding his skill and medical knowledge by stating he felt sure when last he had seen the baronet he could not survive many weeks.

"In fact he might have gone at any hour," said the doctor sagely. "He might have died in his chair, eating his dinner."

This was the most startling situation the medical man's mind—which was much given to the things of the earth in general, and to cookery in particular—could conceive, and he referred to it frequently.

"Sure afther what the docther says," Mary Bryan remarked, "'twas a mercy Sir Lawrence died in his bed like a Christian."

The town of Grantsborough was divided in its

mind by grief for Sir Lawrence's death, and excitement at the prospect of his funeral.

The day on which this ceremony took place, shops were closed, and business suspended; it was regarded as a general holiday. The funeral was a sight such as might not again be witnessed for half a century; it would certainly for the next six months furnish conversation which might lawfully take precedence of speculations concerning the weather, and predictions regarding the crops. It would likewise hold its own in the mental almanac of the local mind, and future events would be dated as having occurred so many weeks or months before or after it had been witnessed.

At ten o'clock in the morning, the hearse, drawn by six horses, covered with deeply-fringed cloth, adorned with nodding plumes and other trappings of woe, left the great entrance of Usher Park House.

The distance to the vault in the old church facing the square, was so short that mourning coaches were not thought necessary for the occasion, and Lord Westcentral and a couple of his cousins walked slowly after the hearse as chief mourners; then came the vultures four abreast, followed by the rector, Fitzmaurice, and the lawyer, the lord lieutenant of the county, with some neighbouring landed proprietors, Mr. Pender Pender and the manager of the bank, Dr. Fowler and Mr. Hennessy, who, though not moving in the same high social rank as his companions, was permitted, in virtue of his office as chairman of the Town Commissioners, to walk side by side with such magnates.

All wore their Sunday suits of solemn black, with tall hats and black kid gloves. The tenants followed, four deep, fine stalwart men, wearing their best clothes, all furnished with hatbands of fine linen; behind came a nondescript crowd com-

posed of tradespeople who were not the baronet's tenants—schoolboys, strangers who had come to witness the sight, and were anxious to take part in the procession, and beggars from all quarters of the county.

The morning was gloriously fine, and the broad road leading through the park by which the procession must pass was thick with dust; clumps of fine old trees dotted here and there over the wide green acres were in full leaf; and groups of deer, startled at the unwonted sight, stood with heads held high, ready for a scamper.

As the funeral wound slowly round the park, and out at the lodge gate at top of the hill, the solemn sound of the church bell, which had been ringing since morning, fell on the ears of the mourners, and between every toll came the noise of the measured tramp of feet, muffled, as it seemed, by ~~dust~~.

As the morning advanced its heat increased, and the tenants from time to time took off their hats and mopped their foreheads.

Slowly down the hill came the ponderous hearse heading the long procession which was to take its way once round the square before proceeding to the old monastic church.

In the windows of the houses by which the funeral train should pass, were crowds of women's faces, at once eager and sympathetic, talking to each other about such points as struck them most, speculating concerning the young widow's feelings, wondering what kind of man was the new baronet, whether he would marry and bring my lady to live amongst them, pointing out the Marquis of Westcentral, who would one day be a duke.

Every man talked freely with his neighbour on topics interesting him, the prospects of a good

harvest, the chances of obtaining Home Rule, Mr. Gladstone's last speech, and its probable meaning—widely interpreted according to various politicians, what Phelan had said at the last meeting of the Town Commissioners, how much Hennessy had given for the colt he bought the other day, what Father Doran himself had said last Sunday, and over the murmur of voices and tramp of feet came the solemn toll of the great bell, which the rooks, hidden from sight in leafy boughs of high trees, answered in hoarse, discordant choruses, like the muttered responses of many voices to chanted supplications.

The procession came at last to the church gate, the coffin was borne through the wide-arched door into the chancel where the last prayers were said, and the solemn service gone through, when dust is committed to kindred dust, until the day when all shall meet before the great white throne.

The procession broke up, the tenants removed their hatbands, and stood in groups in front of the church and round the square, eager to note which of the public-houses would first open its doors that they might refresh themselves.

"Oh, lana macree," said Biddy the Blarney, who, attired in her woollen table cover, was soliloquising and plying her trade amongst the farmers, who gave her coppers grudgingly, "an' it's sorry I am I can't pray for Sir Lawrence's sowl this day, an' he always such a rale gintleman."

"Sure, you have enough prayers an' to spare on the tip o' yer tongue t' supply the whole parish," remarked Ted the Gom, who was standing lazily with his back against one of the trees in the square, from which vantage-ground he was sheltered from the sun, and enabled to enjoy the sight without disturbing himself.

"Thanks be t' God, I have sure enough, but what's the use o' that t' him that's buried t' day, sure it's no prayer can be o' any service t' him now, poor gintleman, an' it's himself we'll miss in the winther maybe, when ther'll be no wan to give us the hundred o' coal twice a year."

"Well, sure, he had his day," another gossip remarked philosophically.

"Ay, an' every dog has his day," said Ted, always inclined to vivacity.

"But sure," said Biddy plaintively, pulling the patched hood over her face, "what signifies the few years spent in comfort in this world towards to be burnin' away for ever in the next."

"An' never be put out 'tall at 'tall," added Ted. "Sure, it's longer they holds out down there than the hundred o' coal does with us, but it's the ould boy himself is cute, an' knows how to make his firin' go far."

"Oh, thin, d'you hear how he talks like a rale haythen, God forgive him," remarked Biddy, raising her hands in pious horror, whilst looking from the corners of her eyes in search of a probable benefactor.

"Sure, it's the only satisfaction the poor have, God help us," said the other gossip, "t' know if we haven't the bit or the sup, or the rag to cover us that we have it all afore us in heaven, an' sure some o' thim that have all the world can give 'em here'll have the misery t' meet in the next life, plaze God."

"An' if yer so sure a havin' the comfort afore you," said Ted, sceptically, "it's a mighty fright you were in last winther, when you thought you was goin' to lave us."

"Ah, thin," said the gossip wrathfully, "it's not talkin' like a Christhian you are to-day, an' I have

me doubts if you're wan 'tall, for sure you wasn't at your duty since Christemas Day, as we all know, an' it's little good can be expected o' you or anywan like you."

"Ay, an' it's Father Doran I saw lookin' at him t'other day; I knew he had that in his mind agin him," said Biddy.

Presently there was a stir amongst the group in front of the church, and from the door came the remnant of the procession; the coffin was about being placed in the family vault where so many of the baronet's kith and kin lay resting peacefully for ever and for aye.

Slowly round to the back of the abbey and down the broken stone steps, between the joinings of which rank grass and verdure grew, the mortal remains of the baronet were borne, past the grim iron gate into the dark yawning vault. In this low-roofed, damp, and noisome cell, where the yellow light of the candles and lanterns made but faint way in the blackness, Sir Lawrence Usher was laid to rest in eternal peace.

CHAPTER XXXII.

READING THE WILL.

IN the drawing-room at Usher Park House the blinds were drawn up once more; two of the great French windows facing the garden stood open, and fresh air, sunlight, and the odour of flowers came into the stately apartment.

Here it was Lord Westcentral, the distant but expectant cousins, the rector and Maurice assembled immediately after the funeral to hear Mr. Webster,

the late baronet's solicitor, read the will. The lawyer was an energetic little man, in a suit of glossy black cloth, the waistcoat of which exhibited much shirt-front. His face was pale, his features mobile, his manner of holding his chin, compressing his closely-shaven lips, and looking from under the pent-house of his brows, was most uncomfortable to witnesses and others of doubtful honesty.

On entering the drawing-room, he bowed to those awaiting him, waving in salutation a blue-coloured document folded lengthways, and tied with a piece of narrow red tape.

Maurice involuntarily let his eyes rest on it for a moment, recognising the deed. Under the great portrait of Sir Hugh Usher a little table was placed, before which Mr. Webster seated himself in a business-like manner, as if it had been a desk; as he unfolded the sheet of foolscap, the drawing-room door quietly opened, and Mrs. Rochford entered softly, her head lowered, an inscrutable look in her cold face.

She could not restrain her anxiety regarding the amount of her daughter's jointure until such time as the rector was enabled to inform her, and at the last moment had decided on being present, leaving Lady Usher in a state of indifference to her future which her mother could not understand.

The lawyer looked at her sharply and compressed his lips, then spread the will before him, straightened himself, stood up, and began reading its contents in a crisp, sharp, monotonous voice. It was short and simple.

First came bequests to various charities, additional sums to almshouses for men and women over the age of sixty, which he had founded and already endowed, legacies to servants, five hundred pounds to Fitzmaurice, finally the sum of five thousand per

annum, payable from the Ballyrogan property, to his beloved wife, and the remainder of his estates and belongings to his nephew and heir, James Patrick Usher.

The distant cousins, the fringe of the family of which the late baronet was the centre-piece, looked at each other; and considering themselves wronged, mentally regretted the expenditure of the travelling fare incurred for the purpose of attending the funeral.

"Sir Lawrence was always an old fool," whispered a cousin in the deepest mourning, a captain in the militia with nine unmarried daughters.

"If he had not been, he would never have married that pale-faced girl with the big eyes," answered another whose grief had been marked during the day.

"Speak easy—her mother will hear you."

"What the deuce do I care!" he replied, with great bluntness and equal bad taste. "The old schemer has played a devilish clever card, and won the game."

"I think I'll go at once."

"Blest if I do until after luncheon, for I'm precious hungry," replied this malcontent, and they grumbled amongst themselves.

As soon as possible Mrs. Rochford slipped from the drawing-room, quickly ascended the great staircase, and without waiting to take breath and resume her usual air of decorum, entered the boudoir and stood before her daughter.

"My dear I congratulate you," she said.

Lady Usher looked up from the book she was reading, but made no remark.

"You are left five thousand a year for life—think of that! Poor dear Sir Lawrence, he was always the best and kindest of men," said Mrs. Rochford,

whose customary calmness had vanished at this crisis.

Madge let the book drop from her knees, and stared before her without replying. She had no practical idea of what wealth meant, money seemed but an abstract consideration to her, and the tidings her mother brought gave her but little satisfaction.

"Five thousand a year my dear, is a very handsome sum," said Mrs. Rochford, who was on the point of adding, "and you may now look forward to marrying into the peerage," but she checked herself, remembering Madge was unfortunately not like the rest of girls, and there were remarks she could not make without wounding her feelings.

"I suppose it is; can I do what I please with it?"

"Undoubtedly. Ah, Sir Lawrence was a generous, good-hearted man. What a blessing you married him!"

The young widow looked at her mother suddenly, with an expression of disdain in her eyes.

"He was generous and good-hearted as you say," she replied, with a new animation in her voice, "but—but, I never should have become his wife had I not thought all chance of happiness had gone by me for ever."

Her mother looked at her with surprise, quite ready to feel shocked at any word or expression that might reflect on her own worldliness.

"I may say this, now he is gone," continued Madge, who felt the sense of relief which thoughts pondered over in secret afford when shaped into speech. "I married him when all my senses were dulled, and I thought my heart broken, but I suppose it's a hard thing to break," she added, with a half-smothered sigh.

"Yes, my dear, it's a providential mercy one always recovers from sorrow and disappointment," said Mrs. Rochford, fully relieved that no blame had been attributed to her, and ready to sympathise with her daughter on any subject whatever.

"I don't know it always is," the widow replied, thoughtfully; "I had begun to see the mistake I had made, and to hate and despise myself thoroughly."

"My dear," said Mrs. Rochford, feeling surprised.

"I can speak of my feelings now," she said, with a cold smile, "and I suppose that shows I am cured, but I did not know myself or my own heart when I married, nor had I knowledge of life, but experience soon makes a woman wise."

"Well," said Mrs. Rochford, "it has all happened for the best."

"I cannot say it has."

"Why, to me it seems merciful," continued the matron, who was inclined to regard all things which happened according to her wishes in a spiritual light. "You have travelled, have been presented at court, spent part of a season in town, gained a title, and now been left a young widow with a handsome jointure, all within six months."

"All these things have given me no pleasure. When thinking within the last few days of those six months, I have—shuddered."

In a couple of weeks she left Usher Park House without regret, and went back to the rectory.

"I will have my old room," she said to her mother, "and let everything continue as before I left, that I may strive to persuade myself there has been no change."

"Of course;" replied Mrs. Rochford, "it is proper you should spend the first twelve months of your widowhood in seclusion, but next year

you can enjoy eight weeks or so of the London season; fortunately dear Sir Lawrence died early in July. I will take you to town in the first week of May."

"Pray don't talk of it," said Lady Usher, and so the matter dropped.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HE SAID GOOD-BYE.

FITZMAURICE had on the night of the baronet's funeral returned to his father's house, full of perplexed thoughts regarding his future, and anxious to make his plans harmonise.

It seemed as if life was just opening for him full of promises, crowded with schemes, of which he was the beginning and end, the aim and object.

Only that morning something unexpected had occurred which gave him food for thought and speculation. A few days before Sir Lawrence attended Lady Everfair's garden-party, he had happened to dine with a member of the ministry.

The party was almost private, and in the course of the evening the baronet had spoken a few words in favour of his secretary, asking the great man to find some post for him.

"What is his name?" said the minister, cracking a nut.

"Maurice Fitzmaurice," answered Sir Lawrence, "the son of an old friend and a neighbour of mine when I am at Grantsborough."

"An Irishman?"

"Yes, but I know that fact will not prejudice you against him."

"Certainly not. I like Irishmen individually, they have talents which only require industry to produce good fruits; collectively I abhor them, as you already know."

"As I know," repeated Sir Lawrence, smiling, and sipping wine venerable in years.

"I once knew a Captain Fitzmaurice," remarked the minister whose recollection was notable for its keenness, and had often served as a powerful weapon in smiting a political antagonist, "many years ago, when I was a young man, and had chambers in the Albany," he smiled, and shook his head at the recollection.

"Yes," said the baronet recalling his stray thoughts.

"He lived in rooms above mine; a thorough gentleman, and a good fellow, with whom I made friends. He occasionally gave little suppers, rather uproarious, when his guests, who were generally his countrymen, drank much whisky-toddy, and sang songs; but I lost sight of him after a while; he was ordered to India, and I never saw him afterwards."

"He was my protégé's uncle," said Sir Lawrence; "a tall, handsome fellow, and his nephew is like him."

"Dear me," replied the minister, helping himself to another nut.

"Captain Fitzmaurice became a colonel; distinguished himself during the Indian Mutiny, returned, and died a few years afterwards; he was a brave soldier."

"Ah, and this is his nephew of whom you speak, this is interesting. I will think of him."

Whatever the minister promised he performed.

So it happened on the morning of Sir Lawrence's funeral a letter came from the authorities at

Somerset House, offering Maurice a vacancy in the Blotting Pad department with a salary of five hundred a year."

When at night Maurice sat with his father at a supper of roast duck, bacon, and a bottle of port, delicacies which the Corporal had specially provided in honour of "Masther Maurice himself," he spoke of the offer he had received by the morning's post.

"Are you to have five hundred a year?" said Casey, from the interior of the kitchen, where he was eating baked potatoes and fried bacon with an excellent appetite.

"Yes," said Maurice, replying to the invisible presence of the Corporal.

"An' will it be any difference t' you if the conservatives or the liberals are in?"

"Not the least, I may hold it for life if nothing better turns up."

The Corporal laughed aloud with delight, his enjoyment not being in the least impeded by his having a potato in his mouth at the moment.

"An' it's the poor day you'll never see again," he said.

"No, Casey, I'll never have to shoot rabbits any more for my dinner," answered Maurice, bitterly.

"Well, it's many the good wan you hit," said the Corporal, "an' I haves to pay two shillin's a pair for 'em now, unless when ould Jack Carroll snares 'em in the night, and then I buy 'em for a shillin' from the ould rogue, an' it's the smallest he always pawns off on me God forgive him."

"I have been thinking," said Maurice to his father, "that, if you'd like to come and live in London, it might be more comfortable for you."

The Corporal was conveying a glass of beer to his lips when the remark was made, but suspended the draught in his eagerness to catch the answer.

For a moment a light came into the old man's eyes, brightening his worn handsome face, then died suddenly, and he shook his head.

"It's not worth my while to move now," he replied sadly. "I have become used to living as I am, and I have arrived at a time of life when changes are distasteful."

"But it's London's the great place," said the Corporal, who would not have set his face against the proposal had his master thought well of it. "An', Masther Maurice," he added, coming into the sitting-room and leaning his back against the door, "sure, Mary Bryan's first cousin, Jim Clery, went over last month, maybe you'd see him in London, they were always ould followers o' the family, and it's he'd be glad to meet you in a sthrange place."

"How is he getting on?"

"First-rate now, sir," answered the Corporal; "he got a situation as futman to a grand lady, a countess itself—the Countess of Everfair—for he had the elegantest character ever you see given him by Mr. Pender Pender, as he calls himself. But, when he first went into service, he was nearly makin' a bad job of it."

"How is that?" asked Maurice.

"Well, the first night he went into her ladyship's house, there was a grand concert given, an' all the fine people in London was there, an' wan o' the princes—the wan that plays the fiddle—was amongst them. Jim was put t' show the ladies t' the cloak-room afore they went upstairs; but sure me brave boy was so dazzled entirely be all the diamon's an' all the grandeur he see for the first time in his life, that he could only open his mouth an' stare at them, an' the devil a bit of him but forgot all his ordhers about the cloak-room, an' he let the ladies

go upstairs an' into the drawin'-room dressed, but soon the countess herself noticed it, an' she sends down to know the reason, when wan o' the other servants, with a big powthered head, come up to Jim, an' he says, 'You booby, what are you thinkin' of t' let the ladies go up with their cloaks on, an' you there t' show them the room?' Bedad, poor Jim got such a fright that he ran upstairs three steps at a time, an', puttin' his head in at the drawin'-room door afore anyone could stop him, he cries out, 'Come back here ivery one o' you an' sthrip!'"

Ulic Fitzmaurice laughed heartily, and the good-natured Corporal thought himself amply repaid for his story.

"I'll leave to-morrow," said Maurice. "I have arranged all Sir Lawrence's papers with his lawyer, and nothing more remains for me, save to make my adieux to Lady Usher."

"An' maybe she'll be the sorriest of us all that yer goin'," the Corporal ventured to remark, but Maurice apparently did not hear his words, and made no reply.

He was to leave Grantsborough by one o'clock the next day, and about two hours previous called at Usher Park House, which Madge had not then left, and sent in his card with a few words written on the back to the effect that he was leaving and wished to say good-bye.

He had not met her since the morning he had announced her husband's death, as she had remained in strict seclusion which only her father and mother were allowed to invade.

As he waited in the great drawing-room, not knowing whether she would see him or not, he felt restless and nervous. Here he had heard the will read yesterday morning.

"If those who listened only knew," he said, "and if she only suspected how much she owes me. I'm glad I burned the later will, it made no one poorer but the heir; he has sufficient without an additional sum of five thousand a year which will some day I hope enrich me."

When he had arrived at this conclusion, a servant entered to say my lady would see him in the morning-room.

Fitzmaurice felt more nervous still as he followed the man across the hall.

"So much," he said, "may depend on the interview; I shall take it as a cue to my future conduct towards her."

Somehow he not only felt nervous, but depressed, and it was a relief when Lady Usher entered; he thought she looked more beautiful to-day than he had ever seen her in the past time when the brightness of girlhood had lighted up her wonderful eyes, and lent a charm of Arcadian innocence to her face.

She shook hands with him and asked him to sit down. Her manner was perfectly calm and unembarrassed.

"It is kind of you to see me," he said, "but, even at the risk of intruding at such a time, I could not depart without saying good-bye."

"I am surprised at your leaving," she replied, but he could not satisfy himself there was any trace of regret discoverable in her face or in her voice.

"I didn't intend going so soon till yesterday morning. I have obtained an appointment under Government through Sir Lawrence's interest," he said, and then added hurriedly, and with some stress on the words, "he was always a generous friend. I—I would have done anything for him."

He hoped she would interpret his speech as he desired, and conclude that he had sacrificed his love for her, rather than act as a rival in her affections to his benefactor; but what interpretation she gave his words, he could not guess.

She turned her eyes away, and her next words sounded as mechanically as ordinary congratulations coming from the lips of a common-place acquaintance.

"I am glad," she said, "you have been successful in obtaining this appointment; when Sir Lawrence told me he had spoken to one of the Ministry, he added that no vacancy might occur for years."

"Yes, I think I am fortunate in many things, but," he added lowering his voice suddenly, "but not in all."

There was an awkward pause, this second attempt of his had failed to gauge her feelings, he could not learn anything from the expression of her eyes; "surely," he said to himself, "she must understand the meaning of my words: if she would only give me one word or look from which I might gather hope, I should be satisfied for the present, but perhaps it is soon to expect even so much."

"Therefore I leave to-day," he continued. "I would have preferred remaining longer for many reasons, but I think it better I should go now."

Here he was on the eve of his departure for months at least, perhaps for years, and this woman who had loved him in the past, was as calm and cold in his presence as if he were some stranger she had met but yesterday.

Could it be possible a few months had destroyed the affection she had once held for him? Was it that he was unforgiven because of the letter he had written her? She had changed, it was true, emerged from her girlhood, and become a woman

of the world, but did this destroy the feelings with which she had once regarded him?

"She must love me still," he said, "but women of the world are actresses, acting comes naturally to them; and let her love me ever so much she will not betray it by word or look or sign. If I could only stay and have an opportunity of wooing her, but that cannot be; besides, it would seem indecent to make such haste now she has five thousand a year. One must regard the conventionalities. But I shall make some excuse for writing to her, and letters do much; a man can say a great many things on paper he might not care to utter, and women have time to ponder over, read, and attach meanings to them. Then she may come to town when her mourning is over. I shall trust to my luck."

Notwithstanding these thoughts and hopes, he felt depressed by the interview, but he believed if she noticed the fact, she would attribute it to his feelings at parting from her.

"We may not meet for months," he said, and his tone was genuinely sad, then added after a pause, "I cannot leave without thanking you sincerely for the kindness you have shown me whilst staying under your roof."

For a second her eyes rested on his face, as if she would read his thoughts.

Would she let him part, he wondered, without one reference to the past, without one word to indicate that all thoughts, words, actions connected with their lives previous to her marriage were not blotted completely from her memory?

"You owe me no thanks," she said, and perhaps her tone was less cold than it had previously been during their interview. "Sir Lawrence had a great personal regard for you."

Fitzmaurice stood up; he had already bade good-bye to his father, and, when he had said farewell to Lady Usher, it remained for him but to drive to the railway-station eight miles distant and catch the up-going train to Dublin.

It was now time his call should end, and yet he was thoroughly dissatisfied with the result of this opportunity afforded him by a quarter of an hour's conversation.

"It is like beginning life again," he said. "I leave this place for London under similar circumstances, and with feelings much the same, as when I went away twelve months ago."

"Yes," she answered; "but you departed then only with hopes, now you leave with assurance of success."

"That may be, yet I feel no happier; I begin to think success does not always bring happiness."

She had risen also, and they stood face to face, but her eyes avoided his, and she made no answer to his last words.

"I often wonder," he continued, after a slight pause, "how the puzzle of my life will end."

"I think most people with imagination are troubled with like conjectures, at least in their younger days," she replied.

"Perhaps; and I have thought of late," he said, with a stress on the last words, "that we are powerless to escape from the iron track of destiny in which we have been placed, no matter what our personal feelings, sufferings, or hopes may be. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she repeated, mechanically, holding out her hand. He took it, and pressed it ever so slightly, and in another second he had gone.

She sat down near the window, where she could see him walking down a garden path leading by a short cut to the lodge gates.

"How I loved him once," she said to herself, musingly, "loved him with all my heart: if he had been only worthy of that love, earth would have been as heaven to me, but now—but now——"

She interlaced her fingers and pressed her palms together, as if suffering from strong feelings, and a little mist of tears came into her eyes, but she brushed them quickly away before they had time to fall upon her cheeks.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BEGINNING LIFE AGAIN.

MAURICE's new duties were even lighter than he expected, for he had heard that under an economical government the old order of things in official departments had completely changed; that gentlemen employed in them no longer read morning papers, wrote novels, political articles, squibs for society journals, art criticisms, or otherwise diverted themselves, but stuck to their desks, and were heavily burdened with business of the State.

He found the truth lay between extremes, and that his duties neither pressed him to the ground, nor yet permitted him to dawdle away the six hours daily spent in his office.

The chief of his department was a kindly old gentleman, whose smooth bald head and glittering shirt front seemed to reflect each other perpetually. He had blue eyes, even white teeth, and a closely-shaven face, save for side whiskers, never known to have exceeded their present growth by the eighth of an inch. His gold-rimmed spectacles gave him the required official appearance. When Maurice saw him on the first morning he presented

himself, his chief was sitting in a comfortable arm-chair, his feet encased in patent leather slippers, a copy of the *Nineteenth Century* in his hands, a little bouquet of geraniums in a tumbler of water before him.

He treated Maurice with some consideration, for the young man had been secretary to a baronet, moreover, he had been appointed to his office through the influence of a great minister. The chief's manner was therefore gracious, he chatted for a quarter of an hour, during which he sought in the most delicate manner to discover what capacities his new assistant possessed. He then conducted him to the next room, when, having introduced him to his fellow-clerk, Mr. Reginald Biscard, who was to share his office, he left the two young men together.

Mr. Reginald Biscard—known to his friends by the simple abbreviation of "Reggie"—was a youth of the period. His light hair was carefully and wonderfully brushed; his trousers clung to his lower limbs, which were long and thin, in a manner that would have been ridiculous if it were not fashionable; his waistcoats were perfect in cut and pattern; his collars were stiff and steep, and his scarves, fastened with a horse-shoe pin, were the envy and admiration of his clique.

His mind was wholly given to the study of art as represented by the music of burlesques and the photographs of opera-bouffe actresses. Concerning the histories of these children of the muses, he was deeply learned. He was ever ready to favour a patient hearer with biographical detail regarding them, and if the origin from which they sprang was occasionally clouded in a mystery which even his patient investigation could not penetrate, he amply compensated for this want by vivid descriptions of

their ways and manners, adding details which were generally no secrets from lovers of scandal.

Mr. Reginald Biscard loved theatrical gossip, and went twice a week to the stalls of the Folly where he stared in dull rapture at Miss Callaby Wrexton, for whom he allowed it to be supposed he cherished a tender passion; he was quite harmless and inoffensive, and had been nominated to his office by his cousin—Lord Harrick, and Maurice, seeing he might be of some use, soon established an intimacy that on Reginald Biscard's side was regarded as friendship.

The twelve months during which Maurice had been secretary to Sir Lawrence had given him an idea of business which now helped him considerably, and he was from the first enabled to satisfy his chief. However, when he became used to his new duties, the monotony of his work became irksome, and left him much time for thoughts that centred round Grantsborough generally and Lady Usher in particular.

He had called on Mrs. Mundella Ryston soon after his arrival in town. She greeted him with her usual graciousness, was glad to see him, but confessed she was dull and strangely depressed. It was near the end of the season, great demands had been made on her time, and she was physically exhausted.

"Mr. Ryston's condition has not improved," she said; "he has been working hard during an exciting session, notwithstanding that the doctors have forbidden him mental labour."

"I am sorry," replied Fitzmaurice, "but no doubt he will get well during the vacation."

"I hope so, we are leaving town immediately."

"Immediately!" repeated Maurice. "I knew you would leave at the end of August, but I didn't

anticipate being deprived of the pleasure of seeing you so soon."

"Yes, we are leaving in a few days, on account of my husband's health; we stay in Sussex first, we may go abroad for the autumn or winter, nothing is settled yet," she said.

"Won't Mr. Ryston come back for the autumn session?"

"I fear not, he intends resigning within the next few months if his health doesn't improve, but this must be kept a secret lest its knowledge should weaken the cabinet."

"Mr. Ryston has always been popular," said Maurice.

Presently they talked of Sir Lawrence, whom she had regarded as a friend.

"He was so gentle and courteous," she said, "and always ready to please. When did you last see Lady Usher?"

"The morning I came away," he answered briefly.

"She regrets Sir Lawrence?"

"I cannot say, they had only known each other for about nine months, and then the difference in their years must be taken into account, it can scarcely be expected that she will grieve for him."

"But he was kind to her, and women value even a little kindness."

"Sir Lawrence was not unmindful of the sacrifice she made in marrying him, he has left her five thousand a year."

"Nor has he forgotten your interests. Am I to congratulate you on your appointment at Somerset House?"

"Thank you, yes. It suits me very well," he replied.

"Have you forgotten my project regarding your marriage?"

"I fear I have," he answered, "I never considered it seriously."

"But you will consider it now," she said, with a searching look.

"Not just yet," he replied. "I feel in many ways rather upset, we will speak of this some other time."

"When I come back," she said smiling for the first time during the interview, "whenever that may be."

"I hope it will not be long till then."

In another week she had left town, and as the first days of August were at hand, many of Fitzmaurice's friends and acquaintance were likewise leaving. He felt unusually dull and miserable, brooding over his future and the uncertainty of his marrying Madge. All his hopes it seemed were fading, and all his friends leaving him. Sir Lawrence, who no doubt would have continued to advance his prospects had he lived, was dead; Madge was separated from him by a coolness which at times he feared she would never overcome; and Mrs. Mundella Ryston, whose mere presence had always cheered him was absent, and might not return for months, perhaps years. Altogether he was depressed.

"If I were only near Madge," he said, moodily, "she might drift back into her old feelings towards me, but whilst I am here what chances have I, and yet though I seem like a bird in a cage in this office, it would be madness for me to resign."

Then his thoughts turned once more to the benefits which five thousand a year would confer on him, and the more he thought over the subject it seemed to him the less chance he had of securing that desirable sum.

"What after all," he asked himself, "if in destroying the last will I have but given five thou-

sand a year to some other man, that would be cruel of Fate." This consideration made him wretched. "If she doesn't marry me she is certain to wed someone else. I never thought of such a possibility; must I allow a stranger to enjoy this money to which neither he nor she has any claim, or shall I confess all to her and cover myself with shame. No, no, I could not do that, and yet how is it all to end?"

This question tortured him night and day. Whilst there was a prospect that he might have the money, his conscience was lulled to repose, but the idea of another man reaping the benefit of his crime filled him with bitterness and misery.

CHAPTER XXXV.

PERHAPS I NEED NOT DESPAIR.

AUTUMN returned with bright days, her signs of plenty scattered over the land, her crimson sunsets, her dreamy eventimes, when purple shadows slowly deepened to night. As weeks and months passed Madge gradually recovered, the frigidity that had bound her existence was gradually melting away.

By degrees the recollection of her married life, the misery and disappointment she had experienced previously, vanished from her mind until it seemed as if the past was a period that had no actual part in her existence.

In the second month of her widowhood she heard, through his solicitors, of Sir James Usher, her husband's successor.

The new baronet did not intend curtailing his travels or returning to Europe for twelve months,

and begged that meanwhile she would occupy Usher Park House, but this she declined. She preferred living at the rectory, making little change in her old ways and habits.

With the county people she became a personage of more consideration; they were disposed to patronise one connected with their order; but Lady Usher, to their astonishment, received their advances with a coldness which to them was a matter of no little astonishment.

"Can it be she gives herself airs?" queried stout Mrs. Millford, of her daughters, looking aghast at the idea.

"I think it can," replied one of them, knitting her red eyebrows in a frown.

"Well, her reign was short," said the matron, with an air of satisfaction, "and perhaps it was all the better for herself."

"I only wonder how she ever inveigled Sir Lawrence into a marriage," said Miss Millford, who five years before, when the baronet had been staying in Ireland, had lavished the wealth of her fascinations on him, and had skilfully intimated her perfect willingness to accept his hand and his income.

"Ah my dear, these quiet girls are ever wily," said the elder lady in fine scorn, "and men are always taken in by them."

To her old friends Madge remained unchanged, and amongst those with whom she spent many pleasant quiet hours were the Miss Daileys. There was something soothing in the presence of these kindly gentlewomen who had passed their quiet and not useless days in one narrow circle, bound by little pleasure and trivial interests.

"We lead quiet lives, but we shall be gay in November," said Aunt Maria to Lady Usher as she

was drinking tea with them one afternoon in their prim drawing-room.

"Why in November?" queried Madge.

"That is our secret," said Aunt Allie. "Will you have a little more tea?"

"Our boy is coming to see us," said Aunt Maria, smiling until her plain face became handsome from its expression of kindness and gentleness.

"He was to have come in August," said Aunt Allie, taking up the thread of conversation, "according to a promise made us last year; but some engagement prevented him, and he went abroad instead, but he writes he will be with us in November."

"Do you mean Mr. Purcell?" said Madge.

"Of course," replied Aunt Maria.

"Is not that pleasant now?" asked Aunt Allie, smiling across the tea-table.

"Very; I met him a few days before I left London at a garden-party."

"Yes, I believe he goes about a good deal," said Aunt Allie proudly, "and he is one of the best and dearest fellows in the world."

From a short period after Sir Lawrence's death, a marked change became visible in Dr. Fowler's appearance and ways. He dressed with more care than he had formerly shown; he was less frequently seen imbibing whisky and water in company with the bank clerks, towards whom he assumed an air of patronage; he took daily exercise to bring his figure into more ready subjection to his tightening waist-bands; he went about with an air of arrogance more or less amusing to Mrs. Pender Pender and the Miss Lawlors who watched him closely, and he became a frequent visitor at the rectory.

For his calls on the rector he had always some

excuse, now it was a patient whose spiritual welfare he was anxious the pastor should look after, again it was some local charity in which he wished Mrs. Rochford to become interested, anon he brought magazines, reviews and society journals to Lady Usher, concerning whose health he became watchful to a degree, giving her free and unsolicited advice and making himself generally attentive to her.

"Poor Sir Lawrence, he was such an excellent friend that I feel I cannot do too much for anyone connected with him," the doctor said to Mrs. Rochford, not for a moment doubting he was paying her daughter a gracefully-turned compliment.

"You are very good," said Mrs. Rochford, with a coldness of tone that Dr. Fowler was quite prepared to overlook.

"Not at all," he said grandly, "it will only render me too happy to be of service to Lady Usher."

Mrs. Rochford smiled a little contemptuously.

"She has always had excellent health, and was never better than at present," she replied.

After this the doctor's gratuitous advice ceased, but his calls continued.

"Ah! the doctor is a wise man," said Mrs. Pender Pender, as she made tea for a select circle of friends.

She had been speaking over the medical man's attentions "to the rectory."

"Yes," said Miss Nellie Lawlor, "but Mrs. Rochford is a wise woman."

"Well, widows have a wonderful attraction for men," remarked the hostess.

"Especially when they have a jointure of five thousand a year," added Miss Lawlor, who having searched in vain for a husband for the last five years, was beginning to feel herself passé.

"Well, the doctor is aiming high," said another gossip, "but I'm certain he will never succeed in his designs on Lady Usher."

"I don't know, women have done more foolish things before now," Mrs. Pender Pender said, intending the remark should bear reference to her own life. She had been one of half a dozen penniless daughters of a major in the line, and had married Mr. John Pender—it was years afterwards that the Pender Pender designation was thought of—then a struggling attorney in a garrison town. From this fact she wished her friends to consider her union a *mésalliance*, and occasionally enforced the same opinion on the legal mind of her spouse in the privacy of domestic life.

"I know well how it will be with Lady Usher," put in Miss Lawlor with some demonstration. "She will marry her old lover Maurice Fitzmaurice."

"Well, sure it would be what she ought to do," said her sister, whose ideas concerning matrimonial arrangements were chiefly derived from her perusal of the *Family Herald* and its kindred literature.

In November Richard Purcell visited Grantsborough looking somewhat thinner than when he had left last year.

"Have you not been well Richard?" Aunt Maria asked on the first evening he sat down to dinner with them.

In the cheerful glow of firelight and lamp, the hollows under his eyes and the prominence of his cheek-bones were perceptible.

"Well," he said, "I have never known a day's illness in my life, but I have been somewhat anxious about business matters of late, and perhaps that has upset me."

"These matters are all right now, I hope," Aunt Allie ventured to ask.

"Yes, perfectly."

Aunt Maria gave a sigh of relief.

"I suppose I am looking thin?" he said, presently. "Some men in town told me I was before I went abroad; but with your good care you will soon make me all right again."

"I hope," said Aunt Allie, looking at him pleadingly, "you will give us an opportunity of trying our skill and remaining with us a long time."

"Yes dear Richard, you will stay with us for the winter?" pleaded Aunt Maria.

"I cannot say how long I may remain just yet," he answered evasively. "I hope it will be for long, but it all depends——"

"On what?"

"On business."

"But you said it was all settled."

"So it is for the present, but I don't know what may happen in the future; it is impossible to say," he answered.

"I hope there is no fear of your losing any money?" said Aunt Maria, interrogatively.

"There is a fear of my losing all the world—I mean—a great deal, or winning more than I can say," he answered.

The two ladies looked at each other and then at him.

Some change had come to him since he had been last with them. Later on they came to this conclusion, not only judging from his words, but from his manner, which seemed to have lost much of its old cheeriness, and from a certain restlessness which had taken possession of him, for which they could not at first account.

"And now," he said, tell me all about your neigh-

bours' movements since I left. I take quite an interest in them."

"They are all much as usual," said Aunt Allie vaguely.

"And how is the old rector—fine old fellow he is—and Mrs. Rochford, and—and Lady Usher?" he said, looking straight before him into the fire.

"They are all well. Lady Usher is looking remarkably bright, you are aware I suppose, she has a handsome jointure of £5,000 a year?"

"What a pity—I mean how fortunate," he said correcting himself quickly.

"Very fortunate indeed; there is no doubt she will some day marry extremely well."

"Is she going to be married?" he asked abruptly.

"Married, good gracious, no. Sir Lawrence is but four months dead."

"But you spoke of her marriage?" he said.

"Yes I mean in the future; she has a title, a splendid jointure, and is young and beautiful, she may marry into the peerage. Really," continued the good lady, unconscious of the slow torture to which she was subjecting one of her hearers, "I would not feel surprised if she married a lord, and Mrs. Rochford intends her to spend next season in London."

"She will put herself up to the highest bidder, I suppose that is what you mean, my dear aunt," he said with an unpleasant ring in his voice.

"Dear Richard how can you say such a thing, even in jest?" replied Aunt Maria.

"It is the way of the world," he answered, "I thought Lady Usher would prove no exception to the general rule, I may be mistaken."

"She is most unworldly in all her ways; she is not in the least changed from when you first met

her, but if anything is more loveable, and we are extremely fond of her."

He brightened visibly at these words.

"I have been talking nonsense," he said, "for the purpose of teasing you about an old favourite. Do you see much of her now?"

"Yes, she comes here often."

"You both," he said, with something of his former pleasant manner, "are looking wonderfully well. I think after all happiness is the secret of health."

"We are very happy, thank God."

"And are not you, dear Richard?" asked Aunt Allie, anxiously.

"How could I be otherwise," he replied, "in such a home as this, and with such hearts as yours to care for me."

Next day Purcell was up early, read for a couple of hours before breakfast, and that meal being over sauntered down by the banks where he had walked the first morning he had visited Grantsborough, eighteen months ago.

The scene had lost none of its charm, and even seemed more fair on this cold November morning with the sun like a ball of fire struggling for mastery amongst the clouds.

The grey ten-arched bridge, with its Ionic pillars and purple wild flowers, the brown weir and the rush-covered islands, the sloping meadows at one side of the river and the dense woods at the other, formed a picture that vividly impressed him.

He could not help thinking of the first morning he had come here, and all that had since happened, especially of his meeting with Madge, and the love which from the first sprang up in his heart for her, a love he strove to restrain, believing as he did her affections were given to one who had known her from childhood.

Now she was free again, he found her richly dowered, a desirable party in the matrimonial market, to be sought by needy peers and penniless younger sons.

Though his love for her might be regarded as madness, he could not resist the desire of seeing and speaking to her once more. He had told himself over and over again that his affection for her would never be returned; he strove to banish her from his memory, but this battle with himself had only served to bring a restlessness into his life which he could not subdue, a fever he was powerless to conquer.

He had gone abroad in hopes change would remove this spell which held him, and enable him to think of her with calmness, but absence had not the desired effect; his love had grown stronger for being kept at bay during the six months passed, and now refused further subjection to his will.

So he had returned looking thin and ill—returned that he might see once more the woman he loved.

He would at least give himself one chance, would plead to her, though she remained heedless of his words; would tell her of his love, though she put it from her; would let her see into his heart, though she was careless of the treasure it held, and never prized it as life's best gift.

The future must alone work out his fate, but, come what might, he should love her to his last day.

He went towards the river by the path dry with the frost of the previous night, his thoughts dwelling on one subject, and, having walked about a mile or so, crossed a meadow, and reached the road running parallel with the bank.

The walk had warmed, the sharp, brisk air in-

vigorated him, and he felt in better humour with himself and the world at large than he had for months past; for was he not near her, and might he not see or meet her any hour or any day? This possibility, which he had once looked forward to with dread, now filled him with delight.

As he walked along the road, he sung snatches of songs; whistled, and occasionally stopped to catch some view of the river winding by the wood, or watch the effect of a bare branch sparkling with hoar-frost, seen against a background of cloud and sky.

Coming suddenly round a turn of the road, he saw at a few yards distant the lithe, graceful figure of a young woman dressed in black, approaching.

At the possibility of its being Lady Usher, his heart stood still. He could not remove his eyes from her face until assured that which he first thought a possibility was now a certainty; in another moment he was standing before her who had filled his thoughts by day and night for months.

"Lady Usher," he said raising his hat and taking the hand she extended.

Her black dress brought the purity of her complexion into relief. The morning air had given her cheeks a faint blush.

"Your aunts told me they expected you home,—I suppose I may call it your home,—and therefore I am not surprised to see you. Your visit has been late this year. When did you arrive?"

Her calmness and self-possession helped him to control himself.

"I came home as you call it, and as I am glad to think of it, only yesterday evening," he answered; "my delay was caused by a visit to the south of France."

"And you have come for the winter," she

said, in a tone that almost, he thought, meant, "I hope."

"That depends," he replied, looking at her and wondering at the change that had come to her since the day he had rowed her in the barge, and read signs of trouble in her eyes.

The cold formality which had marked her manner when last they met had vanished; the look of almost hopeless pain, resting shadow-like in her eyes, gave place to an expression of calmness.

Never had he in his dreams by day or night imagined her so beautiful; he was at once filled with happiness and despair.

"I am going down to visit a child at the Wood House, an old favourite of mine, who is sick," she said.

"Will you allow me to carry your basket?" he asked extending his hand.

She gave it to him and they walked on side by side. Never was a day so bright as this for him; the November sun fell in fitful gleams through leafless branches above their heads, tingeing moss and ferns, growing in luxuriance on the bank beside them, with golden light; away in the woods songs of birds sounded through the clear midday air, and from the roads across the river came the pleasant noise of cart wheels toiling slowly over frosty furrows.

Presently they ascended a narrow path leading to an incline, where two could scarcely find room, save by keeping close, and entering the wood, came to a narrow stony pathway leading to a famous waterfall that poured itself into a rocky bed, and went rushing down a winding channel until it got gradually lost under a thick covering of briar and bramble, ferns and heather, and was seen no more till it joined the river below.

Over this stream a narrow wooden bridge had been thrown, completing the picture the whole scene presented; on this bridge Lady Usher and Richard Purcell stood for a moment.

At either side stretched woods for miles, behind them rose a high rock, its steep, dark surface clothed by moss and the clinging tendrils of many plants; above them—'twixt the opening of the branches—came a glimpse of bright sunlight giving warmth and colour where it fell in patches on the ground strewn with dead leaves, and before them rose the fantastically-shaped chimneys of the cottage of which Lady Usher had spoken.

"How beautiful the country is," she said, looking around her.

"Yes, but you will grow tired of it?" he asked.

"Never," she replied.

"You will spend part of next season in London?"

"I don't know. I have seen little in town that attracted me, and I love the repose the country alone affords."

"After all she has a heart," thought Purcell, "and perhaps I need not despair."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE.

AUTUMN glided into mid-winter, Christmas came with dark nights and dull days, the new year arrived draped in snow, and yet Richard Purcell made no sign of departure from Grantsborough.

"I think you have spoilt me," he said to Aunt Maria early in January. "You have made me too snug in this comfortable nest of yours, and I am

afraid to face the empty cheerlessness of my bachelor rooms."

"How happy you make me," replied the dear old gentlewoman, lifting her eyes from the warm pinafore she was making as part of her New Year's charities, and looking at him with infinite joy in her face.

"Cannot you stay with us, dear Richard, for ever?" said Aunt Allie, who was busy with a mysterious flannel under-garment, likewise destined for the poor.

"For ever," he said, laughingly, "why you would get tired of me and turn me out of doors."

"Well," replied Aunt Allie, with a quiet smile, "perhaps someone else would charitably give you shelter."

"I shall stay with you until I have finished my Irish novel which I began in November. I want local colouring, and it is always well to see what one writes of."

Aunt Maria nodded her head at the pinafore.

"It will take you," she said, "six months to write a novel."

"Which will be read in as many hours by most of Mudie's subscribers," he added.

"And who will be your heroine?" asked Aunt Allie turning the mysterious garment inside out.

"Heroines," he replied, with an effort at carelessness, "are beings of the imagination. There are no such ideals of womanhood to be found in this degenerate world, they only exist in novelists' brains."

"Dear me," said Aunt Allie, archly, "if I were an author I wouldn't seek one in my brain."

"Where would you go, then?" he asked.

"Only to the rectory," she replied, without raising her eyes.

Aunt Maria sitting on the opposite side of the fire, again nodded to her work in a confidential way, but made no remark. The good ladies evidently understood each other.

By-and-by the January days began to lengthen; the short month of February passed away; April was at hand; but Purcell made no signs of departing, though his book was now in the publisher's hands, and was being asked for over the counters of the metropolitan libraries.

At times he told himself he had no right to stay here, where one day he lived in a fool's paradise, and the next tortured himself with misgivings amounting to convictions that the woman he loved would never marry him. Still he could not tear himself away from the spot which held her; could not deprive himself of the pleasure the mere sight of her afforded.

"If I could only be near her all my life, only be her friend, I should be the happiest man on earth," he told himself, "it is madness to think and hope she will ever regard me with a nearer, deeper interest than friendship."

By her manner towards him he could not guess in what estimate she held him. To him, as to all others, she was gentle, considerate, and kind; but, whether she entertained affection for him, he was powerless to conjecture.

He saw her frequently when he called at the rectory for long conversations with her father during winter nights, when he talked of the new continent and its vast resources, its great wealth, its wondrous scenery, its teeming millions of peoples, its rapid growth as a nation, and its probable effects in the future on the older world. Whilst he spoke she would sit quietly listening, seldom interrupting him with questions, but

keeping her eyes fixed on him as if anxious to drink in every word. Sometimes she would sing, and her voice always had a powerful effect on Purcell in stirring emotions and thoughts lying beneath the surface of his calmness.

The rector was always glad of his visits; it was not often a man came within his circle who had lived and travelled abroad, who had a face to face knowledge of other races, knew many cities of Europe, was familiar with their lore, talked pleasantly of their art treasures and their histories, and could give sketches and tell anecdotes of famous men and women from personal knowledge.

Mrs. Rochford too, looked favourably on his visits; he interested her as well as her husband, and invariably suited his conversation to the level of her intellectual demands, steering his way with much tact from the dry and barren paths of archæological discussion in which the rector would oftentimes fain have entangled him. Moreover, he never sought to make himself particularly agreeable to Lady Usher, his attentions to her were simply the common courtesies of a well-bred man. There was no danger, Mrs. Rochford considered, in his frequent visits, which after a while the family at the rectory began to regard with interest and pleasure. Lady Usher would sometimes unexpectedly visit Aunt Maria's, drink tea with them, and chat to him with less reserve than in her father's house, staying occasionally until dusk, when he saw her home; but the while no words crossed his lips which might betray the secret his heart held.

It was better, he thought, to hold his peace than to destroy by one rash word the paradise in which he lived; at present he existed in anticipation; the hope that comes of uncertainty cheered him,

and this was better than the sure despair in which her answer might plunge him.

"I have faced the chances of death before now with a braver heart than I could wait for her reply," he told himself, and then wondered if this love which held him should lead him to a very heaven of happiness or a certain hell of misery.

Spring came, sowers were in the fields where ploughs had turned up fresh brown earth, into which seed was cast with many hopes; bud and leaf came on tree and shrub, primroses hid in lanes, showers made green the land, the sun smiled with promise of summer days.

Towards the end of May, Mrs. Rochford began to hint her desire of spending a few weeks in London at the beginning of June.

"The world soon forgets one," she said to her daughter, "and all you have gained in the past season may be overlooked if you are not seen this year."

Madge did not desire to be remembered by society, but had no excuse to plead for not complying with her mother's wishes, and her parents looked forward with pleasure to the change a couple of months' residence in town would afford them.

It was finally arranged they were to leave Grantsborough at the end of May, and Purcell's heart sank when he thought of the number of wooers Lady Usher's beauty would attract, and remembered the worldly views of her mother.

But when Mrs. Rochford had begun to make preparations for her visit, the rector became suddenly indisposed, and was ordered to Bray as soon as he felt sufficiently well for the journey.

"There is nothing so bracing as a sea breeze," said Purcell to Mr. Rochford. "I have no doubt your stay will do you a world of good—indeed, the

atmosphere here is relaxing. I may soon take a run across the Atlantic to brace myself up—perhaps next month.”

This idea had just occurred to him as amongst the possibilities of the future should his suit be rejected.

When he ended, his eyes accidentally rested on Lady Usher’s face; he thought she had turned pale, but she made no remark.

“You speak of crossing the Atlantic as if it were but an hour’s journey,” said Mrs. Rochford with cheerful indifference.

“I have crossed it before,” he said with a laugh, “and use begets indifference, they say.”

“You will not have gone before I return?” said the rector. “We shall be back in a fortnight, I expect, or three weeks at longest.”

“I can never count on my actions; it doesn’t take a bachelor more than half an hour to pack his portmanteau.”

“Well, if you really go, you will come and say good-bye to us. Bray is not far from Kingstown—it will be quite in your way,” the old man added kindly.

When Purcell turned round again, he found Madge had left the room.

Just a week after this conversation, he drove the rector, Mrs. Rochford, and Lady Usher to the railway station; the two former only were going to Bray; Lady Usher, like himself, merely accompanied them for the drive, as she decided on staying at the rectory during their absence.

“We are a quarter of an hour too early,” she said, as they reached the wretched-looking station standing bare and bleak on an elevation above the miserable little town.

“And probably,” said Mrs. Rochford, “the train

will as usual be late, and we shall only have to walk up and down the platform and have patience."

"You will certainly have to walk or stand," said Purcell, "for in that box eight feet by eight, called by a stretch of courtesy a waiting-room, there is only one chair, and that has a broken leg."

"There is a down train from Dublin due shortly, I heard one of the porters say; we can watch those that alight by way of pastime," said Madge.

"Here it is," said Purcell, and immediately afterwards the engine steamed slowly into the station, and deposited half a dozen passengers on the opposite platform.

When the train had gone on its way once more, Mrs. Rochford and Purcell at the same instant recognised Fitzmaurice standing with his back towards them waiting until his hat-case and portmanteau should be removed. In another instant he turned and saw them, raised his travelling cap and quickly came across the rails.

It was an awkward meeting; Mrs. Rochford turned pale with vexation, and the cheeriness vanished from Purcell's face. Lady Usher seemed indifferent, and the rector alone made any show of friendliness towards Maurice. On the other hand he looked at them in blank amazement, and with evident disappointment which he could not conceal.

"Are you all going away?" he asked.

"Only Mrs. Rochford and myself," replied the rector; "I have not been well, and am going for a few days to Bray."

Not only did all trace of anxiety disappear from Maurice's countenance, but he brightened visibly, to Mrs. Rochford's increased annoyance. Since she had last seen him he had grown tall and stout and generally improved, even she could not help ad-

mitting he was handsome, and had a certain air of distinction in his bearing.

"I wish my dear," she whispered to Madge, whilst Fitzmaurice was talking to Purcell, "that you would come with us, it is not yet too late; you can live as quietly as possible, and Joyce will pack your boxes and have them forwarded."

"No," she answered smiling at her mother's sudden anxiety. "I had rather not, I have made up my mind to stay at home."

Mrs. Rochford was not satisfied, but she could say no more just then, as Maurice and the others joined them.

"I have got but a short vacation; just a fortnight, and I came over to see—my father," he said regarding Mrs. Rochford's face as he spoke with some amusement.

"She is afraid of my proposing to Madge in her absence," he thought. "If she only knew how much she owes me, I wonder what she would think of me?"

"Only a fortnight!" remarked Lady Usher, and immediately Purcell and her mother turned and stared at her, as if she had made some uncalled-for remark.

"Only a fortnight," remarked Fitzmaurice, "but I may see you again before I go, Mrs. Rochford," he said coolly. "The rector tells me he may not stay more than ten or twelve days."

"Yes, not more than twelve days," replied Mrs. Rochford, who but a few minutes before had intended spending, at least, a month from home.

"Any news from town?" asked Purcell.

"Yes Sir James Usher has arrived, I was introduced to him a few nights ago, gossip says he is to be married at once—an old engagement—but here is your train, Mrs. Rochford."

"We can drive you home," said Lady Usher turning towards him.

"You are more than kind," Maurice answered. There was hope in his eyes as he spoke.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHAT HE SAID.

FOR many days succeeding Maurice's return Furcell was restless and troubled; he spent much time out of doors, taking solitary walks of ten or twenty miles, and returning home in the evenings tired and exhausted. He avoided the rectory studiously, and during this time saw little of Lady Usher.

Once however he met her when returning from one of his long pedestrian tours, and his manner was constrained and cold.

"I hear you have been taking a great deal of exercise," she said lowering her eyes before his steady gaze.

"Yes; sometimes I walk against thought, as it were, but thought gets the better of me, the body becomes exhausted whilst the mind is fresh."

"I have heard authors weave their plots best out of doors," she said, venturing to look at him, and noticing his anxious face.

"And sometimes," he replied, "they cannot get rid of their characters once they have conjured them up; the genii will not go back into the bottle. That is my case at present, I cannot escape from my dream."

"Is it then so unpleasant?" she asked, whilst the colour came and went on her cheeks.

"Unpleasant—no, but it is a mockery; it is to me what the sight of a warm comfortable room, having tables spread with sumptuous fare and rare wines, seen in the glow of firelight, is to some poor beggar child shivering in the cold and dying of starvation without."

She understood his meaning and was silent; some words she longed to speak rose to her lips, but she struggled with herself and suppressed them; then she abruptly held out her hand to him, bade him good evening and was gone, leaving him standing on the road.

"If she cares for Fitzmaurice," he said as he turned and looked after her, "she will marry him. I believe she loved him once, she may love him still, they have known each other since the boy and girl period of their lives, it would be useless, hopeless, dishonourable for me to try and win her, and yet I torture myself with thoughts of what might be if I had share of her heart. Oh God, what a happy man I might be if such a thing were possible." He spoke as if the words were wrenched from him.

He turned and went home with all his hopes and fears fighting their ceaseless battle. Aunt Allie and Aunt Maria hovered round him, during his dinner, unobtrusive yet careful of his wants: they understood something of his feelings, and were mutually sympathetic, hoping all things would come right in the end, and that his happiness would be secured.

"An' I tell you what it is, Miss Allie dear," said old Nancy, "take me word for it, Misther Richard is in love."

"In love?" said Aunt Allie, as if surprised at the old woman's revelation.

"Ay, thrue enough in love; ur, I know the

signs of 't, an' I was that way wance meself; but it's the bad attack he have entirely, Miss Allie, for sure he passed me in the hall t' other day an' never as much as noticed me, though his fine dark eyes were wide open an' fixed on me all the time, an' he looking like a ghost, alanna."

"That seems bad indeed," said Aunt Allie, thoughtfully. "And I fear he is getting thin, Nancy."

"Oh, the never a bit o' harm 'twill do him in the long run, me dear lady; sure, it's as bad as the faver itself so long as it lasts, but they recover mighty soon agin, as I did meself when Jim Dunphy—an' it's he was as fine a boy as you need wish t' set yer eyes on—went t' 'Merica an' never said the word t' me that I would have given me young life to hear; but that's nigh fifty-five years ago come next Michaelmas, an' it's alive and well I am to-day, thank God."

"So love doesn't kill," said Aunt Allie, softly.

"Never a bit of it, though them that's sick with it think it do; an' sure as for meself I thought an' I wished that it's unto the grave I'd go when Jim went an' me heart went with him, but not a bit o' me; I couldn't go on frettin' for ever, an' sure I married Pat Commins three years after, an' it's the good wife I made him, God be merciful to his sowl."

"Dear Richard," said Aunt Allie, thoughtfully, as she turned away. "If Madge only knew what a good fellow he is, I think she would make him a happy man."

Maurice likewise seemed abstracted in his manner and thoughtful: he had come to Grantsborough with the determination of proposing to Lady Usher, and once near her began to feel confident in the success of his suit. Now and then, however,

some word that fell from her lips, a look that came into her eyes, afforded him grave matter for consideration and doubt. Her reception of him at the railway station had removed many fears that had previously clouded his mind, and gave him considerable confidence in himself, but his hopes were frequently chequered by the frigidity of her manner at times when he trusted he had made advances in her good graces.

He had seen little of Purcell and strove to avoid him; for his mind was too full of his projects, too crowded with plans and schemes for the future time when he should be the possessor of five thousand a year, to brook the commonplaces of ordinary conversation.

He had no doubt Madge would marry him: he had been the object of her girlish love, and he knew a woman's first lover remains through life her hero whom she surrounds with a nimbus of unfading romance; this belief was the foundation of his hopes. Surely if she had loved him in the past she would love him now, he had not changed save for the better.

He acknowledged to himself he did not love her as people—especially before marriage—understood love, but he would be always kind and indulgent, and no doubt they would become good friends and settle down as a model husband and wife in the future. He had quite arranged he would woo and wed her, become master of her fortune, and live happily ever afterwards.

But the first week of his stay passed and he had not proposed, no opportunity had presented itself. He had seldom seen her alone; when he called at the rectory, if there were not some visitors with her already, she was never at home. However, when the early days of the second week went by, he

determined he would lose no further time, but ask Lady Usher to become his wife, for there was no knowing what day Mrs. Rochford and the rector might return, and his opportunities would then be lessened.

Accordingly he took heart of grace and called one day as early as the conventionalities would permit, but she had gone out to drive; he therefore left a note asking her to see him at eight o'clock that evening if convenient. If there was no reply to his letter before the hour mentioned he should consider she had kindly granted his request.

No answer came, and at the hour mentioned Maurice presented himself at the rectory, and was immediately shown into the drawing-room, lighted with candles, and odorous with spring flowers. Lady Usher was not there, but she would see him immediately. Maurice's nervous organization, which did duty for a heart, was sorely troubled; he felt uneasy, almost shy, and began to wish he was safely out of doors again. But the task had to be accomplished, and all his fears were merely the outcome of excitement, and were unreasonable and groundless. By the time he arrived at this conclusion, the door opened, and Lady Usher entered the room.

She greeted him calmly, but without coldness. Her face was perhaps paler than usual, her dark eyes were grave and thoughtful.

"I have asked you to see me," began Maurice, when they were seated, she with her back to a cluster of tapers, whose light fell on his face, leaving hers almost in shadow, "because in a few days I return to town."

"It is a short vacation," she replied with an air of carelessness that made it difficult for him to continue in the strain he had planned.

"And I am anxious to ask you," he said, not

seeming to heed her interruption, "to let us renew those old feelings of friendship which existed between us until—until your marriage."

He paused hoping she might say some word that would help him, but she remaining silent he was obliged to continue.

"I hope you will let us be to each other what we were in the past, the old happy past," he added lowering his voice to the sympathetic tone which from experience he knew was effective, "before the world parted us, and your interests interrupted our happiness. Blot the past two years from your memory for ever: let us be as we were in your girlhood, as I have always hoped we might be in our later years; for I have always loved you, Madge—I love you now more than ever."

He could not see the expression of her face, but he stretched out his hand and would have taken hers, but that she snatched it away.

"Mr. Fitzmaurice," she replied in a calm cold voice, in which he could detect no tone of nervousness, "have you come here to insult me?"

He saw at a glance the position in which he was placed, his only plan lay in defending himself, and perhaps overcoming her by protestations of faithfulness and love.

"Insult you! You cannot think that for a moment," he said in an aggrieved voice. "Yes, if indeed it be insult to declare I have always loved you; it was my affection alone, my interest in you prompted me to advise your marrying Sir Lawrence rather than selfishly to ask you to share a life of struggle and poverty with me. It was affection which dictated my letter to you, 'your mother told me it was my duty to renounce all hope of winning you, and you can never know what it cost me to write those lines.'"

"I am no longer a girl," she replied firmly, "I have seen something of the world, and have learned a lesson which, though bitter, was not without value, and I therefore know how to appreciate your words."

Was it possible she was about to reject him? In order to make her wealthy, that he might participate in her riches, he had wronged Sir Lawrence's successor beyond the possibility of repayment, save by avowing his deed and drawing bitter shame upon his head; was he to have no part in the money he had sinned to give her? This was impossible; she must, she should heed him; he would plead to her with all the strength of his feelings, with the hope of his life in his voice.

"If you could only read my heart," he said, "you would see I have never for a moment ceased to love you. Do you of all others blame me for the sacrifice I made in renouncing all pretensions to your love: have you no compassion for the misery I daily endured whilst living under one roof with you whom I had lost?"

She smiled bitterly, then answered him.

"I was once a foolish girl, and I believed you loved me. I will not say that your words, your conduct, your letters led me to this conclusion; I may in ignorance have mistaken what the world might call courtesy for deeper feelings——"

"It was not a mistake," he interrupted, "your heart was right in believing in my affection. Surely you must have felt it far better than words of mine can express."

A look of impatience came on her face, she was about to rise, but restrained herself.

"Let us end all this," she said, "I have learned to know you as you really are; henceforth we must meet as strangers to each other."

"For God's sake don't say that," he exclaimed, remembering at this supreme moment the wealth he had dreamt of possessing was slipping from his grasp.

She made him no answer.

"Can nothing alter your decision?" he asked, white to the lips with humiliation and anger.

"Nothing," she answered, briefly.

All the hopes he had built, his plans for the future, his schemes of success, fell shattered at one word, and a feeling of despair entered his heart. He could scarce believe he heard aright, that she who had once voluntarily given him her love should now refuse his suit, that the day-dream in which he had indulged for twelve months should at one word vanish into air, that his expectations would never be realised.

When he stood up and looked into her face, he read the confirmation of her words.

"You voluntarily put from you," he said, with some sense of his disappointment finding vent in his voice, "an affection whose object it would have been to surround your life with happiness."

"I cannot," she answered fixing her eyes on his, "put from me what does not exist. If I am ever loved it must be for myself, and," she added with emphasis which he long remembered, "not for my money."

He lowered his eyes and winced perceptibly. She, whom he thought he could shape to his will, whom he fancied would readily allow her heart to be led captive by his words, whom he had believed invested him with ideal attributes, had pierced the surface of his protestations, and read his mind aright. She had torn the mask from his face, and left him standing in shame, confusion, and anger before her. He had lost the stake for which he had

played ; the money for whose possession he had sinned could never be his.

Should he tell her there and then he had burned Sir Lawrence's last will, that she enjoyed wealth not legally hers, that she unwillingly wronged her husband's successor ?

For a moment he hesitated.

Here was an opportunity that might never occur again ; with one sentence he could rid himself of a burden that through past months had hung heavily on his mind, which in the future might prove as a millstone round his neck. He wavered, then came the thought of her scorn, the loathing with which she—the soul of honour—would regard him ; he pictured her eyes flashing with scorn, he imagined her words of contempt, he fancied the horror with which she would shrink from him, and, above all, the gratitude she would feel in being saved from becoming his wife.

Better any amount of mental torture in the future to her disdain in the present ; he could not endure it now.

He drew himself up, and calming himself, said with some show of dignity—being determined to play his part to the end—

“You have ungenerously attributed a motive to my proposal which, in my present position, I am powerless to refute. If fortune ever sufficiently favours me,” he continued, fluently, with some sound of regret in his voice, “and places me in the position I desire, it will be the happiest day of my life when I am able to prove how far you have mistaken me. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” she replied and in a moment the door had closed behind him.

He went quickly down the path in the gloaming of the young May night, and turned his steps

towards home. He had come along the road but half an hour ago with hopes of certain success, and now returned feeling crushed, humbled, hopeless, his heart a chaos of maddening thoughts. He walked along rapidly, his eyes bent on the ground, his mind wrathful that her woman's quick sagacity read his motives and discredited his words. As he approached the town, he passed the figure of a tall, square-shouldered man, who immediately stopped and addressed him.

"Halloo, Fitzmaurice."

"Ah! Purcell," he answered, turning round, "I didn't know you in the dusk."

"No, you were going at such a deuce of a pace. Where have you been?"

"To the rectory," he replied, the words escaping him unthinkingly.

Purcell drew nearer, and looked into his white troubled face: as he did a thought flashed through his mind which suspended his breath for a second. Had Maurice proposed and been rejected, or was it that Madge was ill?

"You found her well?" he asked, with some agitation.

"Yes, of course. Good-night, I'm rather in a hurry. By the way," he added, as an after-thought struck him, "I may not see you again before I leave, so I'll say good-bye now."

"Before you leave? Why, you have four days of your vacation yet remaining, you are not going to-morrow?"

"I am. I have had some letters which made me alter my plans a little; I am anxious to spend a day or two at Brighton with some friends. Adieu; I suppose I shall soon see you at the other side of the Channel?"

"I have not yet decided when I shall depart."

"I wonder you can spend your days in a hole like this, when you have seen better places. I wouldn't live here for a thousand a year. Good-bye again."

Purcell stood and looked after his retreating figure.

"Why does he leave suddenly?" he thought. "Something has occurred, I can see by his face and his manner; I am sure he has proposed for Madge, and she has rejected him."

A feeling of elation born of love and hope took possession of him, a new joy sprang up in his breast, a fresh sense of happiness seemed suddenly added to his life.

"If, after all, she loves me!" he said. "Oh! God, what a world of happiness is held in such a thought!"

And he went his way in the dusk dreaming pleasant dreams.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHAT SHE SAID.

A BRIGHT May morning, and the world full of sunshine and gladness; no clouds in the sky, no darkness on the land, early flowers in woods and lanes, verdure turning broad fields from brown to green, promise of bud and blossom everywhere. A day to be glad that one exists, a day when doubts vanish, hopes live, and happiness lies deep in the heart.

Richard Purcell had seen Madge soon after breakfast pass through the square, a light basket in her hand, on her way to visit her little patient at the Wood House.

"God bless her," he said, watching her lithe

figure, "she is as good as she is beautiful; what a treasure for a man to hold in his heart all the days of his life—a treasure above all price."

He remembered his meeting with Fitzmaurice on the previous night, and a new thought flashed on his mind.

"I will speak to her to-day," he said, "for on a day so bright and glad I think nothing can happen to darken my life."

But when he thought that the turning point in his existence had come, that the next hour or so might decide his fate, his hand trembled so that he could scarce light his pipe.

"Bah, I am as nervous as a woman," he said, with a forced laugh.

When she had been some time gone, he strolled leisurely in the same direction as if it were a matter of perfect indifference where he took his morning walk; but as soon as he got beyond range of the watchful eyes of Mrs. Pender Pender and the Misses Lawlor, and out of sight of idle gossips and self-constituted spies, he strode rapidly down the road which wound beside the river whose waters rippled and sparkled in the morning light.

Before he had gone a quarter of a mile he caught sight of Madge, then he slackened pace and his heart began to throb against his side.

"I experience to-day the dread men felt long ago when they questioned an oracle whose answer meant life or death," he said, as he drew near her.

Overtaking her he raised his hat, and held out his hand; there was an unusual brightness in her face, an expression of gladness in her eyes which made her look more charming than ever.

"You are on your way to see the child, I suppose," he said, "may I carry your basket as far as the cottage?"

"Thank you."

The glow on her delicately rounded cheeks deepened as she raised her eyes to his face.

"What—what a glorious day this is," he remarked, not knowing what else to say and wondering how he should steer the conversation towards the point he at once desired and feared.

"Yes, is it not—and it is also a memorable day for me," she added.

A memorable day, what could she mean?

"Is it your birthday?" he asked.

"No. You would never guess."

"Then tell me?"

"You know Sir James Usher has just returned, and it happened when they were setting the St. James's Square house in order, they found another will made by Sir Lawrence the day after that on which he was taken ill."

"It was therefore his last?"

"Yes, and Sir James's solicitor has written to me about it. I received his letter this morning and a copy of the deed."

"Is there any alteration in its contents," he asked with interest he could scarce conceal.

"Yes; if I remain unmarried I am to have six thousand per annum, but if I change my life that sum will be reduced to five hundred a year."

"I am glad—I am delighted—no, no, I mean—" he never finished his sentence.

The light brightened in her eyes, the blush deepened on her cheeks and spread over her face.

"I am glad also," she said, quietly.

He understood her, and the words he longed to express rose readily to his lips.

"The thought of your fortune was one of the barriers that long kept me back from telling you I loved you, that I loved you from the first hour we

met, that your face has never been absent from my mind, that I could not banish thoughts of you from my heart though I strove with all my might. What can I say, Madge, but repeat with all the force of my life and soul in my words, I love you. Can you make a sacrifice, a great sacrifice, for my sake ? ”

The brightness and warmth of the sunshine, the beauty of sky and land, seemed mirrored in her eyes and reflected in the happy look on her face at this moment. A joy deeper than she had yet known crept into her heart and banished all darkness and pain for ever ; tears came to her relief, but her lips were silent.

For answer she extended her hand to him as a promise she would give it to him before God's altar, walk by his side, his friend, help-mate and wife, as long as life lasted. He took it between his strong palms, pressed it to his heart, and bent down and kissed it again and again.

“ God bless you my darling,” he said, “ you have turned my life from night to day, you are my treasure, my blessing, you will be the crown of my life, only let me hear you say you love me.”

“ I love you,” she said, quietly and solemnly as if uttering a vow, “ after our conversation in the barge last summer, I often thought of you, and when you came here, and saw you and listened to your voice, I could not help loving you.”

“ Love,” he said, “ is a note struck from the heart ; when a responsive note sounds from another heart unison of perfect happiness is obtained.”

“ To-day my happiness is complete,” she answered.

He bent down and kissed her lips, it was the seal of a life's compact.

Maurice had been a week in London, when one evening the post brought him two letters. One he knew was from Purcell. He opened the envelope carelessly, not expecting to find news of any interest from Grantsborough; but as he read the first few lines, his attention became riveted, and when he had finished the letter he laid it down, flung himself into a chair, and gave a sigh of relief, as if a load of care had been lifted from his shoulders.

"Another will found, what a mercy! I could not have borne the secret much longer, and the shame and degradation of a confession haunted me like some horrible spectre I was powerless to lay. I have sinned, but I have suffered night and day, and relief comes like a pardon and brings peace once more."

He turned to the letter and read it again and again, as if to convince himself of the truth of its contents.

"And Madge is going to marry Purcell; he is a good fellow and I hope they may be happy; I feel now as if I could be friends with the whole world."

He took up the second letter, addressed to him in an unrecognised hand; a momentary sense of impending trouble seized him as he tore open the envelope. Taking out its contents he immediately looked at the signature which was unfamiliar and unknown to him, then read the few lines to which it was affixed. They ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR,—

"At the request of her husband, I beg to inform you Mrs. Mundella Ryston departed this life last night. She had been ailing but for a day; her death is attributed to heart disease from which

her doctors were aware she had suffered. The funeral will take place on Monday at midday,

“I am, yours truly,

“HENRY DAVIS.”

Maurice read the words, whilst a sense of horror and affliction gripped his heart. His face hardened and grew pale. In this moment his love for the dead woman he should see no more was revealed to him. Desolation and misery flooded his heart.

The world seemed slipping from his grasp leaving him lone; his hopes were at a blow emptied of their promises, his ambitions reduced to worthless pitiful desires. Solitude, drear and boundless, beset him. He folded his arms on the table by which he was sitting, and buried his head upon them. Evening waned, night grew apace, but he scarce stirred. It was almost morning when he rose up a better man.

THE END.

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